

EVERY "BOY SCOUT" SHOULD READ THIS

AMERICAN WEEKLY INDIAN

BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

THE MASKED RIDERS



MAINTENANCE
OF THE
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THE MASKED RIDERS

OR

THE MYSTERY OF GRIZZLY GULCH

By COL. SPENCER DAIR

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

BLACK PETE BUDGELL—The outlaw leader of a band of blood-thirsty robbers, whose deeds made them a terror to all who came in contact with them in the great North-West, and whose fight with a member of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, who had sworn to exterminate them, ended only when they disappeared into the whirling spectral smoke, that hung like a death-pall over the awful Mystery or Grizzly Gulch, near Old Crow River, in British North America.

NORT BONAIR—A bandit whose grim humor did not stay his hand from his quivering victim, whom he removed by rifle, revolver or knife, in his mad lust for gold.

JOHN FANE—Constable in the Royal North-West Mounted Police. He went to death's terrible door time and again, in his search for Black Pete, and only the luck that hovers over a brave man kept him from passing the portals that lead into the other world. His fight, almost alone, against the power of evil as exemplified by Black Pete's outlaw band, is a strange history of grim endeavor. And yet through all his dangers he was ever the fighting man of the North-Western territories.

ONE-EYED DELL BENNETT—Driver of the stage-coach that runs

each summer from Fort McPherson, in British North America on toward Herschel Island, that bleak Hudson's Bay Company post, far out in the great Arctic Ocean. One-Eyed Dell was a gun-fighter of fame, and he "pulled his weepin" often just in time to save his charmed life.

JANE MARTIN—Pretty, blonde, a woman with a will, and a store of good red blood that came to her from her frontier-born mother and her father, a fighting captain of an Arctic Ocean whaler. Jane knew just when to recklessly jump into the danger zone and save her life and her associates from a terrible disaster.

KITTIGAZUIT—An Eskimo girl, who came from the old Kogmollock tribe and who, in spite of her stolid bearing, knew now and then how to follow in the brave tracks of her white sister, Jane Martin.

"THE DEER"—A spying Indian member of Black Pete's gang.

"THE SERPENT"—A companion to "The Deer" and like him a member of the outlaw band. He did his part in the effort to exterminate his foe with the treachery of the Indian, and the stealthy hatred for his foe of the wild panther.

CHAPTER I.

THE PIT OF THE OUTLAWS.

"There's a dead man there!"

"Whar?"

"Along side of the road; can't you see him?"

With a rattle of harness and a quick pressure of his

foot on the brake-bar, One-Eyed Dell brought the swaying stage-coach to a stop.

"Whoa, you 'tarnal critters; stop, will ye?"

While yelling at his four mettlesome bronchos, One-Eyed Dell trained his single orb on a grewsome thing that lay directly in his line of vision.

John Fane, Constable in the Royal North-West

Mounted Police, hitched his revolver forward where his right hand could reach it.

It was he who had first spoken.

His quick eye had noted the grim silent body, and his voice had warned One-Eyed Dell his companion on top of the hurrying coach.

The cumbersome vehicle was winding its way along the stage-road that leads from Fort McPherson, in Mackenzie territory, British North America, toward Herschel Island in the Arctic Ocean, the far post in the great Canadian North-West.

At the right Old Crow River was wending its way through a steep canyon; in the distance glittered Musk Rat Creek, a tributary of Old Crow River, while at the left the vast Canadian woods extended as far as the eye could reach.

"It's a body all right," cried Old Dell.

"Yes. I hate to fool with a body out here."

"You bet. Thar's liable ter be summin we don't like ter think of 'bout handlin' a dead body thet's died suddent like, out here. Dead men sometimes tell some tales the livin' ones would like ter hev not told. So we aint givin' ter much handlin' o' the dead."

Fane nodded.

"Right, you are," he remarked, "but in this case I must take the risk. It's all in the line of my duty."

"Well, yer suttin' fool-hardy," rejoined One-Eyed, as he pulled his horses back into the road where they straightened out ready to dash onward.

"Possibly, but again I must plead duty as my reason for disturbing that body at all."

"Duty? Who speaks of duty in the sun-rise of the beautiful morning?" put in a mocking, sweet-toned voice, and John Fane turned to see a most coquettish head of blonde hair sticking out of the coach window, falling still further in the most ravishing manner over a round, regular face. A pair of extremely pretty blue eyes which were bubbling over with fun and mischief, completed a picture that Constable Fane would never forget.

"This thar copper," pettishly cried One-Eye, "is a thinkin' of gettin' into trouble by a goin' out and examin' the body of a man what he sees from the top o' this yar coach."

The girl gave a gentle scream.

"A man's body?" she ejaculated. "Oh, Kittigazuit, give me a bottle of smelling salts out of my valise quick!"

The dark face of an Eskimo of the Kogmollock tribe, was framed for a moment in the coach window behind that of the blonde young girl, and then vanished.

"Why don't you lean up against her name until she gets the salts?" cried Fane, with a roguish twinkle in his eye.

"Whose name?" asked the young girl with amazed eyes. She had forgotten all about the fainting part of her programme.

"Your Eskimo woman's. She has one that is about a yard wide."

Jane Martin, the blonde girl, opened her eyes wide.

"I am surprised!" she cried. "You make a joke and you are a Canadian?"

One-Eyed Dell Bennett exploded in a burst of laughter.

"Say, you two 'ud make er dawg laugh," he cried. "An' I ain no dodo o' a dawg."

"But we jest while a dead man lies out there," replied John Fane gravely. "We must learn why he is there."

"I don't know why an' I guess I don't want?" remarked One-Eyed Dell. "I hev a bit o' hoss sense left an' I don't wanter know nothin' erbout that thar dead man."

"Why not?" sharply asked Fane.

"You're—new ter these yar parts, eh?" asked the stage-driver.

"I am."

"So am not I," laughed Jane Martin.

"Wall, ye wouldn't hev asked that thar question ef ye hadn't been a tender-foot up this here way."

"Then the finding of dead men isn't unusual in these parts?" asked Fane.

"Thar ain't many men up hereabouts, but among those thet is hyar, it ain't no onexpected matter ter find one o' thar number dead along the road."

"You don't say so?" gasped Jane.

"I suttin' do say so," One-Eyed Dell went on. "Thar's a lot o' folk up hyar thet knows, when thar's a dead man found, who is ter blame, and so they don't go fer to ask questions. See?"

"You mean that when a man is found dead that it is well known who killed him, so there is no use of asking questions?" said Fane.

"Wall, I guess yer about shoved in yer chips and wop the pot without my a hevin' even a show down fer me pile."

"I am right then?"

"Sartin."

"Who do you think commits all these murders, for if a man dies suddenly and his friends know about it, it can not be from natural causes that he died, or why should friends hold their tongues?"

"Fer a copper ye argue almost ez good ez a lawyér. Say, I admire ye exceedin'. What's better nor admirin' ye, ye hit the fact right on the nail."

"Then most men found dead up here in this part of the world are murdered."

At the word "murder" Jane Martin's face turned white and it disappeared within the coach with remarkable celerity.

One-Eyed Dell rolled a big tobacco cud around his cheek.

"We don't use the word 'murder' up here much," he remarked, winking at his off horse. "Ye see it's a

mighty ugly word, and thar's a lot o' the boys hyar erabouts thet hev mixed up in them thar murder trials you hev in the U-nited States so they don't right cotton to the word. We fellows don't call it murder out hyar."

"What do you call it?" asked Fane.

"We speak o' it as a 'killin'."

"Oh!"

"Yes. Ye see it means a corpse jest the samey and it kinder lets the feelins' o' some o' the boys down easy like. Taint no sense to rile a man all up by bringin' in things thet remind him o' his passed up life, which he quit quite a spell back before he comes to the North-West."

"Then there may be some people out here that don't like to have the early part of their lives reviewed?"

"Wall, now ye talk thet way I may as well admit thet yar telling the gospel truth."

Fane thought deeply for a space. Then he turned toward the stage-driver and resumed the conversation.

"What would happn to a man if he did try to get to the bottom facts of some of the killings, as you call 'em, here?"

The stage-driver's eyes searched the Constable's face long and carefully before he answered.

"Hev ye been in th' territory long?" he asked with a dry smile.

"'Bout six weeks."

"Thought so."

"Why did you think so?"

"Because you wouldn't hev asked thet thar question ef ye'd lived out hyar long."

"Why not?"

"Ever hear o' Black Pete, the road-agent, er his gang o' bandits?"

"No."

"Hum."

"Why this mystery? Explain what you mean."

"I don't mean nothin'. I jest asked ye a civil question ter git a civil answer—whoa thar, ye oneasy divils."

The latter sentence was spoken to the stage-coach horses which were dancing about uneasily.

One-Eyed Dell gazed at Fane for several seconds with a smile on his face. He shook his head during that time as if his inspection did not exactly aid in making up his mind.

"I ain't see enough o' ye," he remarked, with his keen gray eyes trying to read the very soul of Fane, "ter make up me mind as ter whether ye is a damphool tender-foot thet's a runnin' inter danger like a little lamb, just 'cause he don't know no better, or ye are one of them fellers wots sadly needed up in these hyar parts—Whoa, thar."

As if to see what made his horses prance about so all

over the road, the stage-driver got down from his seat and after looking well over the animals, he stood leaning against the side of one of the roan leaders and then beckoned to Fane.

"Come here!" the driver whispered in a shrill undertone that carried only as far as Fane.

Fane drew near.

"I don't know nothin' fer or agin' them wimmin in that thar coach," he said when Fane had reached his side, "an' they's may be all right gals but I ain't the kinder man thet likes ter have wimmin folks git mixed up in a line er talk thet aint got nothin' but men's work into et."

"You mean that what you are going to say to me concerns men only?"

"Men only an' fitin' men at thet."

"It's stuff that fighting men alone should hear."

"Yer on, boy. Ef ye ain't a fightin' man ye had better tell me ter close me face, an' say notin'."

"As to the fighting part of your argument, I can't say much, except that some day we will see whether I can fight."

"Yer will hev ter fight ef ye gits inter the game I'm framin' up for ye."

"Well, I'll promise that if I do have to fight I will do my best. Will that answer do?"

"Good stuff! It'll do right well."

"Then let er go."

One-Eyed Dell hesitated no longer.

"I guess yer O. K.," he said. "Now did ye ever hear o' Black Pete Budgell, the outlaw leader?"

"I told you a little while ago that I had never heard of him."

"Got er good memory, haint ye? Wall, seein' as yer a pretty lively young chap I'm a goin' ter tell ye about him, and when I gits through ye kin make up yar mind whether yer feels like examin'in' that thar corpse up the road."

"Go ahead," replied Fane, as he leaned against the "Wheel-hoss on the nigh-side of the coach," as One-Eyed Dell put it.

"Wall, that thar Black Pete is some bad-man."

"A gun-man?"

"Sure. And a gambler, thief, murderer, bully, smuggler, bandit-leader—"

"Hold on," cried Fane, "that's enough of an indictment. If you can convict Black Pete of being anything like what you have charged or can put legal evidence in court to prove just one of the things you have just called him, I will agree to come in and whisk him off to jail in a jiffy."

One-Eyed Dell burst into a roar of loud laughter.

"Yer funny," he remarked. "Thar's been many a chap come out hyar ter put Black Pete in jail!"

"Why didn't they do it?"

"They went fer to do it all right, but ye see Black Pete beat 'em ter thar gun, and they didn't make no

arrest. They kinder naturally decided ter stay by these parts in er grave."

"Then Black Pete is quick with a gun?"

"Rawther."

Two hawks were sailing over the heads of the two men when One-Eyed spoke.

Fane glanced up at the birds.

They were flying low in great circles.

Each was flying in an opposite direction and so every now and then they met as they flew by each other.

Fane drew his revolver.

"Look!" he said, "see those two birds right above us?"

Dell nodded.

Just as the flying hawks were passing each other and thus were in line, the revolver of Fane broke the echoes.

Bang!

The echoes were still madly flinging hither and thither this report of Fane's weapon when the two hawks came fluttering to the ground, atoms, now, of feathers and bloody pinions.

The shot of Fane had killed each bird in mid-air.

One-Eyed Dell was gazing at the remarkable shot, and its effect with wide open eyes, and mouth.

"I'm something of a shot myself," laughed Fane as he pointed to the dead hawks.

"Biggosh ye be," cried One-Eyed in huge admiration. "Say, ef ye and Black Pete git ter shootin each other up, I hopes I'll be thar ter see et; t'will be a fight fer a man ter see, thet will."

One-Eyed shook his head in vast admiration of the picture that his imagination had drawn.

Fane laughed.

"Well," he said briskly. "I guess that shows you I can hold my hand and play it with all my very best chips, no matter what kind of cards Black Pete may hold."

"You bet. But thet's all I gotter say about Black Pete."

"You have done some describing of him, at that. But where does Pete the outlaw live?"

"Search me."

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"Does any one know?"

"Guess not."

"Why not?"

"Dunno."

"Isn't there some reason why the home of Black Pete is not known?"

"Not thet I heern tell of. He don't come ter none o' the settlements any more ter drink and rise hell the way he uster do. They's too many men er lookin' fer him; fer some o' his devilishnesses. He mount git a dozen men arter him et oncet."

"Oh, he is afraid to go to any settlement for fear a posse might get after him."

"Shore."

"Does he camp out about here?"

"I don't know."

"What do you think?"

"I don't think."

"If you don't think can you tell me stories of any one that does?"

"Yep. Come here."

One-Eyed Dell lead Fane to the big trees that shielded the road thickly on all sides.

He stepped toward a small clearing and with his strong arm parted the bushes so that Fane saw that the road was winding along the top of a mountain.

He could see a fertile plateau far below him through which a gleaming river ran.

"See thet river?" said One-Eyed.

"Yes."

"Now that's a fine river all right, but they call it up hyar whar they's so many big rivers, jest Musk-Rat Creek."

"Oh."

"De ye see thet thar smoke a curling up down thar?"

Fane looked in the direction where the stage-driver was pointing.

Floating lazily in the air was a thin, purple-black cloud of smoke.

It made a gigantic finger pointing toward the sky. There was something about it that made a queer unaccustomed chill run up the back of the young policeman as he gazed.

There was something uncanny about it, something that seemed to clutch his heart strings as he gazed.

"What is there about that smoke that seems to appall me so?" he asked.

"I dunno," cried One-Eyed. "They aint no one thet knows why they feel so when they sees thet thar smoke."

"Does every one who sees it feel this queer fear that seems to seize my vitals?"

"Yass."

"Why?"

"Because they's beeh a hunderd men who has seen thet smoke and has started down the canyon ter find whar ot comes from."

"Did they find out?"

"Naw."

"Why not?"

"Because they searches an' they searches an' they never find no smoke."

"What?"

"Jest thet, and nothin' more."

"Do you mean to tell me that the smoke which we see so plain up here can not be found when one goes down to the low-lands to find it?"

"I do."

"Whew!"

"Wouldn't it jar ye?"

"It does."

"An me too."

The two men gazed at each other in silence.

"Where are we now in this wilderness?"

"About ten miles from La Pierre House."

"What kind of a place is that?"

"It's an old post of the Hudson's Bay Company. There's a few buildin's thar. Nothin' else."

"The Hudson's Bay Company is the great fur trading company of the North-West."

"Shore. Ef 'twant fer them every one 'ud starve up hyar. They buys all the skins from the trappers out hyar, en they controls this hyar stage line and about all thar is o' business out hyar."

"Is there much business out here?"

"It's nuttin' but a big game and fur bearin' country. White en Indians er all the people thet live out hyar, and they ain't so many. They all sell what they gits to the Hudson's Bay Company."

"I am making my first trip out here, you know, so I have to ask these questions."

"Oh, thet's all right. It's yer first trip an' I'm thinkin' twill be yar last."

Fane smiled.

"Oh, I dunno," he cried.

"Wall, yer all right," added One-Eyed Dell, "but yer aint on yit ter the game yer up agin."

Fane speculated over the situation with bowed head.

For a long time he cogitated with himself just what course he had better take.

At length, One-Eyed Dell, who had been watching him with narrowing eyes, saw that he had made up his mind to something.

"If I hold this coach for a spell what would you say?"

"Ef ye tell me to stop as a Mounted Police Constable, I'll stop till th' ice forms in a hotter place then this yar."

"I won't keep you that long. But I'm going down to the canyon below to see what I can see."

"What about thet dead man thar?"

"Don't touch the corpse till I come back. If I am not back in two hours you drive on and await me for twenty-four hours at La Pierre House. If I am not then there, you count on me as out of your game and continue your journey."

"Ye ain't agoin' ter go down whar thet smoke is a comin' from?"

"I am."

"You're a darned fool. Ye'll never come back alive."

The only answer to this remark was in the crashing of the underbrush on the steep sides of the canyon.

For before he could speak his companion's name

again, One-Eyed Dell, in dire amaze saw the intrepid John Fane, hurry away down the side of the canyon.

"He's a goin' to his death, all right," gasped the frightened coach-driver.

CHAPTER II.

A MAN'S WORK.

In the first burst of his downward journey, John Fane went at wonderful speed.

He knew little of woodcraft, and he made a good deal of noise.

His progress was shown by clouds of startled birds which circled around his head high in the air above him.

His progress, therefore, was marked as sharply as if he had put up a gigantic sign announcing his steps.

Fane had got pretty well down to the bottom land, and was urging himself along through thick underbrush, when, as he rounded a tall spruce tree, he saw a figure standing by the side of a black horse.

Fane stopped sharply.

The figure, although armed with a rifle and bearing a brace of revolvers attached to a belt around its waist, made no attempt to attack him so Fane boldly continued on his way.

He did not allow his hand to press his weapons but lunged forward with a free step as if meeting an unexpected stranger in the depths of a North-West forest was not an unusual proceeding.

When Fane was within ten feet of the silent figure, it raised one hand, and in a deep, slow voice said the single word:

"Halt!"

The command came with such easy assurance; there was so much power in the pose of the figure that Fane's heels clicked together in true soldier fashion and he stopped with a military drawing up of his tall athletic form.

"Who are you?" the figure said.

Fane saw the man was muscular. His long arms seemed to reach far below his knees, as he allowed them to drop in an easy position of attention.

The figure's wide shoulders were garbed in a trapper's jacket of deer-skin edged with ermine:

Moccasins were on the man's feet. Long leggins of moose-skin reached to his thighs.

His head wore no covering, but his long hair of ebony hue, fell down on his shoulders almost to his waist.

Upon the man's face was a mask with little holes for the eyes, and narrow slits for the lips.

No one could tell who the man was. The mask, expressionless and changeless, told no story of identity.

The stranger was safe from any eye that might try to see what name he bore in the ranks of the world of men.

Fane took in these points with a quick glance of amazement.

Strange as he was to this wonderful land, Fane knew that there was even in the North-West, something unusual in meeting in a wilderness of forest, a silent, masked figure.

The figure was without question quite as interested in Fane as the Constable was in him.

Without a word they both gazed at each other until Fane broke the silence.

"May I ask who you are that ask me to stop on my journey in such a peculiar manner, and with such a peculiar way?" Fane said.

"My way is my own, and my manners also belong to me," the stranger replied in a deep growl of words like some caged animal calling for the old days of freedom to return.

"Let me say to you that I do not like your ways and your manners are likewise objectionable," returned Fane.

The stranger bowed.

"Permit me to say, that I accept your rebuke, and I add that while I accept it I do not care whether you like my ways or my manners."

"Do you know why I do not like them?"

"Why?"

"Because they too greatly resemble the general attributes of a highwayman."

"Well put. And what if I was a highwayman?"

"I should be compelled to remove you from my path."

"It takes a man to remove me."

"Possibly? Yet indeed I might be the man needed to do a man's work in this case."

"You mock me?"

"I never mock men with arms at their sides and with rifles in their hands."

"Afraid to mock them?"

"No."

"Why then?"

"I fight them if they disturb me. I go in peace if they do not."

"Which course are you going to take with me?"

"That depends upon yourself."

"How?"

"I am now going on my journey. If you try to stop me I shall fight."

"If I do not?"

"I shall continue my journey in peace."

The figure made no answer for a moment.

Then the stranger spoke.

"Where are you going?"

"Upon my business."

"And that is?"

"My business."

"And not mine?"

"Precisely."

"Suppose I make it my business."

"You must take the consequences if you do."

"Will you tell me your name?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Will you tell me your name?"

The stranger jumped to his horse. He whirled the beautiful beast to the right. He spurred the animal deep and hard and vanished through the woods like a whirlwind.

Trailing back from the flying figure came the sound of the raider's voice.

"My name is Black Pete, the outlaw. Beware!"

Fane heard the words with amazed ears.

"Black Pete!" he cried, "The Masked Rider!"

Fane's hand flew to his revolver but his quick glance told him of the futility of the proceeding.

"I couldn't hit him if I wanted to; he is too far away;" he thought, "and not now do I want to fire a shot at that man; bandit though he is, he makes a gallant figure."

Fane's thoughts were very complex as he resumed his journey. "Black Pete is right," Fane mused. "It is a man's work that I have taken up."

Fane started forward.

But he had not taken one step when he heard the sullen, dull sound of a shot come booming down the mighty corridors of the forest.

Then shrill, clear, appealingly, there rang upon his shuddering ears the cry of a woman in deep distress and in imminent peril.

"Help! Oh, help!"

The wild cry surged in Fane's brain, it travelled like an electric spark down into his heart.

"God!" the young man shouted. "Jane Martin is shrieking for help."

A second shot boomed upon his ears.

With the speed of a frightened deer, Fane rushed backward up the steep hill to where he had left the coach.

A terrible sight met his eyes as he surmounted the height.

CHAPTER III.

AMONG THE MISSING.

"Where is the coach? Where are Jane Martin, One-Eyed Dell, and the Eskimo woman, Kittigazuit?"

John Fane mourned and cried as he said these words

aloud as soon as he had reached the spot where a short hour before he had left the stage-coach, its passengers, and its driver, the shrewd middle-aged frontier's man.

"The coach—where is the coach?" whispered Fane in agony. "Has it gone forward as I instructed—no, for the time was not nearly up that I had set as the limit before starting and One-Eye would never dare to disobey my order. What is this—"

The agitation of the intrepid young man was increased when he saw lying on the ground a bloody veil.

"Blood!" Fane cried. "It's Jane Martin's veil. I saw her wear it this morning."

A few feet from the veil, Fane saw another startling object.

A revolver lay in the dirt.

Fane darted towards it. He picked it up.

"One-Eye's revolver," said Fane. "Yes, I know it well. There is blood on the hilt, also."

Fane spoke too well. The revolver handle was smeared with blood.

Fane examined the revolver.

There were two shots that had left the empty cartridges.

"Did One-Eye fire the two shots that I heard?" thought Fane. "Or were these cartridge shells exploded long since?"

But when he turned over the facts in his mind he felt sure that One-Eye would not have carried a revolver with two empty cartridges in it. He knew the frontier, where "a gun's a gun and is meant to be either not used at all, or be ready to use quick—and don't bluff with it but when you pull it use it"—creed of the burly men that made up the scant population of this part of the Western hemisphere.

"One-Eye is no fool; he wouldn't carry a gun that wasn't bristling with unused cartridges," summed up Fane at length.

Fane's eagle glance tried to pierce the veil of mystery that was obscuring the real conditions that had existed.

The coach was missing; so were all the passengers and the driver of the vehicle.

This was a verity.

There had been some kind of an attack on the stage coach.

This appalling circumstance was indicated by the blood stained revolver and veil.

Was the coach attacked by Black Pete's band of outlaws?

Did Black Pete make the attack single handed and alone after he had left him?

These two possibilities were turned over and over in the mind of Fane.

He could find only endless conjecture as the answer to the questions.

The only sure fact that he could twist the mute

evidences of the attack into, was that there had been an attack; a fight, and someone had been injured.

Whether One-Eyed Dell had sustained an injury; had Jane Martin been the unfortunate victim, or had the Eskimo girl, Kittigazuit, suffered—these three points Fane knew were sheltered in absolute darkness.

"It's up to me to find out," Fane cried.

He could not help thinking that his own position was desperate.

He had no knowledge of the country around him. He did not really know where La Pierre House was to be found.

He sensed one point only and that was that the road probably lead to La Pierre House. If he kept the road in the direction that the coach-horses were headed when he left the vehicle on his unfortunate journey, it was possible that he would reach his destination which he remembered One-Eye had said was about ten miles off.

But a road in the North-West and a road in the civilized East are two different propositions Fane knew.

The road over which he had to travel on foot was unworthy of the name given it.

In fact it was now merely a wide trail, cut through timber, winding up hill and down dale; and at times so obscure that only a man familiar with it could pass along it.

"This road most of the time doesn't differ from the forest itself," remarked Fane aloud. "I am liable to be off the trail any second, and while down here on this part of the confounded trail, or road, the atmosphere is rather equitable, five miles further up the mountains I will be in the land of everlasting, eternal snow and ice. I can see the white capped mountains, over which I must hurry to get to La Pierre House, sticking up their heads ready to freeze me to death."

Fane glanced down into the river bottom.

He could see that Old Crow River here wound through a beautiful plateau between two ridges of mountains about fifty miles apart.

The divide over which he would have to pass was at least 1,000 feet higher than the ground on which he stood; it was absolutely barren. The precipitous, rugged serrated sides of the great mountain that he would have to surmount and cross, appeared to be guarding his way like a sentinel flung out by the gigantic force that made the world.

Fane shuddered.

"What is there about the vastness of this country that seems to turn your brain? Everything is so grand, so awe inspiring, so different from the civilized world? I can see how men go crazy in vast solitudes away from their kind."

"Food is going to be a problem with me. Although it is June I see that all the ice has not run out of old Crow River, and it's almost Twin River, which

bears the disgraceful name of 'Musk-Rat Creek' has quite a bit of ice upon it yet. The clear atmosphere does not let one know that it is colder than the Junes I've been used to; and it's so strange to see snow here, early Spring verdure there, 'winter lingering in the lap of spring.'"

Although not much of a woodsman, Fane knew that the ptarmigan, ducks and geese had already migrated.

He might find deer or elk but he had no time for an extended hunt of larger game, and even if he risked starvation he feared that it would mean his death at the hands of Black Pete, or his bandit gang, if he shot at game and thus betrayed his presence.

"What a dolt I am?" he then cried, "the outlaws know that I must be here where the coach last stood when I left it. Any second a shot may come out of ambush. Then my life would be forfeited to my own callow carelessness."

So speaking, Fane searched the trail for tracks of the coach.

He could find none.

In the flashing glances he turned over the scene in hopes of unearthing some shadowy clue to tell him whether the coach had gone forward or backward, Fane's eye rested upon the grim corpse that still lay by the side of the road-trail, where he had first spied it.

"I must examine the corpse," Fane thought with a shudder.

He approached the body.

It lay on its back, its half opened eyes seeming to scan Fane's face as if in entreaty for aid.

"A young man," mused Fane as he gazed down upon the distorted face. "About twenty-three years of age, a year younger than I! I might be here and he might be where I am gazing at him, if Dame Fate had given her distaff a different twist. Well! Well!"

A bullet hole directly through the center of the dead man's forehead told where his life had been taken.

"Shot through the brain," cried Fane. "Death must have been almost instantaneous."

Fane did not like the task which now presented itself, but he manfully searched the pockets of the unfortunate man.

Not a single thing was found.

Further the dead man bore no weapons.

As Fane was turning away he noticed that the corpse had extended its hand so that it stretched toward him.

"Was that hand extended when I first saw this body?" thought Fane. "Or is this merely muscular contraction which has caused that hand to move; the arm to outstretch? Or——"

His speculation was cut short for he saw extended in the dead man's hand something that fluttered in the wind that swept over the dread scene.

"What is that?" cried Fane. He jumped back in fear. "A message from the dead?"

Cautiously, fearing a trap, Fane carefully approached the corpse, every fiber in his body ready to meet any attack from a concealed, living foe that might be hidden in the forest that lay on each side of the road.

Nothing happened.

So Fane stole stealthily forward.

He grasped the fluttering object from the white-cold, dead hand.

"A card?" cried Fane. "What? There is a message written upon it. What is this?"

Fane rapidly read the message.

Then he gave a cry of anger and fear.

"The message——"

Fane's face was white with suppressed passion.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OUTLAW'S PLOT.

Farewell to festering corpses cold,
Hurrah for love and the light!
We reach our camp loaded with gold,
The lure of the outlaw's life!

A rich baritone voice sent these rude words hurrying into the depths of the forest.

"Yes, this outlaw business is mostly festering corpses, all right, only the outlaws do the corpse and festering act, not the *in-laws*."

This sentence was shouted at the singer who turned when he heard the words and signaled the speaker to advance.

The singer was Black Pete, the outlaw.

The advancing speaker was Norton Bonair, a trusted associate of Black Pete.

He was a tall chap with brown hair, a clean-shaven face, muscular, and sardonic in his view of life. A different type from black-bearded Black Pete, the desperado-leader of the thugs that made up his band.

But equally a man to be feared; together the two men made a terrible force for the officers of the law to cope with; and when they were backed by their gang of fighting men, brawny ruffians gathered from all over the criminal districts of the world, they made a fearful unit.

No band was more to be feared in the wild North-West than that of Black Pete, and Nort Bonair, as he was better known among the bad-men of the territory.

"What are you making such a fearful disturbance

for; are you ill?" questioned Bonair as he neared Black Pete.

"Naw! I was singing."

"Do you call that singing?"

"Sure."

"Who told you, you were singing?"

"I didn't have to be told, I knew it myself."

"You are the most wonderful bandit I ever met."

"Why?"

"To know that those awful howls were intended to be construed by your friends as a song. Why, Pete, I thought you were in trouble and needed my strong right arm. Next time you start to sing will you put up a heap big sign in the camp and make it read this way: 'I Black Pete, am about to sing. All those rude, dreadful sounds that you will soon hear issuing from the forest, are not calls for aid from me, but are really my bird-like voice hunting for high C.'"

"Oh, you-always making a sarcastic kind of joke of everything in this world."

"What I said was no joke."

"What was it?"

"True facts. Did you write those sweet words that you were singing?"

"I did."

"Made 'em up out of your head—all that rot about 'festering corpses' and 'love and gold,' and say, you have been dippy for a long while. Oh, you bold, bad, thug."

"Guing still, you 'bold, bad' trifter. If I want to write rhymes and sing them to myself, what of it? I am not bothering you?"

"Oh, ho, not if you keep your song to yourself. But when you roar out to the forest a lot of words that make one's blood run cold and scare all the game big and little back where we can't get at 'em without infinite labor, it seems to me, gentle sir, that it is time to quit."

"You thought I made too much noise?"

"No."

"But you said you thought so."

"No I didn't."

"What did you say?"

"I said you were making too much noise, not that I thought you were doing so. I can hear. I knew you were making too much noise the moment I heard you."

Black Pete burst into a loud laugh.

"You are a joke, you are," he said in between the bursts of his merriment. "You ought not to be with me. You ought to be a lawyer back at Fort McPherson."

"I have always thought I was thrown away in this business."

"Why?"

"Oh, the game isn't what it used to be."

"That's right."

"We haven't held up a coach in a long while."

"Do you know why?" sneered Black Pete.

"No I don't."

"Because the echoes of the last hold up have kept us out of every white man's haunt in the North-West. A posse has been after us ever since we held up that last coach."

"That's so."

"So it won't pay to hold up another one."

"Oh, I don't know."

"What good would it do to get the gold off a coach; where could we spend it barred out as we are from so many places hereabouts?"

"There's wider lands than the great North-West, my boy," added the speaker. "We might change our game to some other place. How about the Montana way, or over in American soil in Alaska, why not, eh?"

"Sounds good to me."

"Why not hold up the next coach and get what we can, and then skip to the North-West about the Arctic circle, lay off there awhile and do business there."

"Y-e-s—that might be a good plan. There's plenty of whalers to loot. One ought to get a lot of whale-bone alone off a sunken whaler. Then the whalers all do business in skins, and we might get good loot off one or two ships—then after they had got next there what would be your plan?"

"You know the whalers all winter about Herschel Island."

"Yes."

"We might locate there?"

"That's so."

"Most of the sailors are ashore living with their Eskimo wives."

"Yes."

"We ought to get good pickings off the ships. There's good cash in every whaler's strong box to pay off the crew with, run the general expenses of the ship on, etc."

"You're right."

"A winter spent there might be productive. Then we could jump when the ice goes out in June next year, over to Nome, on the United States realm of Alaska. Say, there would be good pickings out there, I should say."

"There ought to be. The miners there ought to have good gold as a result of their winter's work. It is a plan that might be good to think over any way."

"Well, that plan is all for the future—now what about the present?"

"I suppose that we will have to do something to keep the pot bilin' for the present, but what can we do?"

"I don't know."

"Say, there's one thing I want to ask about. Who

is the young chap that has been moseying 'around here the past few hours?"

"What do you know about the chap?"

"I see him a lookin' at the corpse you left up along the road side."

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roared Black Pete, "he has got a surprise coming to him there."

"He has?"

"You bet."

"Why?"

"I handed him a nice one. He will git to it sooner or later."

"What was it?"

Black Pete drew nearer to Bonair.

He leaned over and whispered something in his ear.

"He! He! Haw!" laughed Bonair. "Say that's great. I'd like to see that chap's face, when he——"

"Now you shut up. Close your face. Don't tell all you know, Nort."

"All right."

Both men grinned at each other. The joke was in their minds a very funny one.

"That's a good joke but it doesn't help me a bit in knowing who that young chap is," remarked Bonair.

"I can tell you sudden like."

"Who is he?"

"Constable in the Royal North-West Mounted Police."

"What?"

"Sure."

"That's bad."

Nort Bonair's face was grim and white.

The news came as a great shock.

"I suppose they have sent him out here to hunt for us."

"By 'they' you mean, Inspector Jeffrey of the Mounted Police, in charge at Herschel's Island?"

"I do."

"Well, why don't you shoot this young Constable? You can do it in a breath."

"Quicker than that. All I have to do is to just lay out under a tree and bimeby when the Constable comes by let him have it—it would be all over in a minute."

"Then why don't you?"

"Because I am afraid to."

"What?"

"Yes, clean afraid."

"Oh fudge!"

"Well, it isn't this puny chap I'm afraid of, but it is the force behind him I'm afraid of."

"Afraid of Jeffrey?"

"Not a bit, nor of the handful of Mounted Police he has up at Herschel Island. They don't count. My gang could shoot them all up in ten minutes, but what

I am afraid of is the power that is behind that handful of men."

"Oh!"

"Just that and nothing more. These Mounted Police have a way with them of never giving up the trail of a man whom they are after."

"I didn't know that."

"It's true. If we killed this Constable we wouldn't have any peace until we had left this country. We could not ever step on Canadian soil again. The police would dog us ever, even over on American soil. Our lives would be one long hide-and-seek with death."

Bonair was awe struck.

"They would catch us sure some day, wouldn't they?"

"Sure."

"Is that why you hesitate over killing this Constable?"

"The only reason. I met him in the woods a spell ago. I could have got him easy then. But I didn't dare to take his dirty life. I had to let him go because of the Canadian Government behind him."

"Well, what if he makes it too hard for us up here?"

"Then I would have to kill him whether I wanted to or not. You can't stop to argue about a gun's maker, and the fact that there's lots of other guns he makes, behind the one that's being pointed at you. In this case you try to kill the fellow that's got the other gun."

"That means if you can you don't want to put this Mounted cop in his grave unless he gets too gay and makes you to preserve your own life."

"You're on. But I am not fearing him very much."

"Why not?"

"He hasn't been out in this territory very long."

"What? A tenderfoot?"

"Yes."

"Oh, there isn't any trouble coming from him."

"I don't know about that. The old gun-man who has lived out here knows some of the chances he has taken when he faces us, and so is kinder careful like. The tenderfoot doesn't know anything at all about chances or dangers and he rushes at us and we have to give him his stunt in the way of cold lead, in spite of ourselves."

"Do you think this fellow a rusher, like that?"

"I don't know. Haven't seen enough of him to know what he will do. A young man is rasher than an old man."

"That's why you always look for young men for our band?"

"Yep."

"Well, if you don't kill this young Mounted Policeman, what are you going to do with him?"

Black Pete leaned over and whispered with uncouth

glee to the listening ears of Bonair his patiently laid plan for the removal of John Fane.

"Gee," cried Bonair, "that's great. How did you ever think of it?"

"Isn't it? I just guess no one will twig that game, eh? Say, I think it is the best scheme I ever put up."

"When are you goin' to pull it off?"

"Right away."

"That's the goods! Don't wait when you have a game like that to start."

"You had better help me."

"Sure as you are born."

"Come on then—how long has that Mounted Policeman got to live?"

"If all goes well we ought to get him by nightfall."

"And say—no one will be wiser to our part in it?"

"You bet. There's always a way to kill a Mounted Policeman besides shooting him off a horse's back, eh?"

"You bet. Your plan's the best ever."

The life of John Fane, therefore, was hanging in the balance as the two murderous robbers, outlaws from the society of decent men, hurried away, still plotting to remove their deadly enemy.

CHAPTER V.

THE BANDIT'S MESSAGE.

"Beware! This message is handed to you, by my dead hand, as a warning! I am one who tried to arrest Black Pete, the outlaw. Take warning by my horrible death. *The man does not live that can arrest Black Pete, the outlaw!*"

John Fane read these words.

His face was expressionless as he did so. He knew that it was a grim warning he was receiving from Black Pete.

But he did not quail in the slightest degree.

"This is the death-challenge," Fane cried. "Black Pete I accept your warning and right here I hurl back your defiance in your face. This corpse be my witness that I will never drop my vengeance-quest until the hand that killed you is in another grave, like the one I am about to dig for this poor devil."

There were absolutely no marks that would lead to the identification of the still form that lay by the road side.

But Fane knew that it was his duty to enter in a note book in which he jotted down all of his official acts, the height, probable weight, color of the hair and eyes, and a description of the clothing of the dead man.

Then by using a space between two gigantic rocks as a receptacle for the body, Fane soon covered the hideous corpse with stones, and he breathed freer as he did so.

"No man has a more impressive mausoleum than that murdered man," said Fane to himself. "Here in this magnificent country of terrible grandeur, amid the primeval forest, that unknown man will sleep well. Life's fitful fever is over."

With his Bowie knife Fane scratched a rough tombstone on a tree that grew near the rocks.

"Underneath this boulder," Fane wrote, "lies an unknown White Man, murdered by Black Pete, and his outlaw gang. I have sworn to avenge him."

"JOHN FANE,

"Constable, Royal North-West Mounted Police."

"Black Pete," cried Fane to the vault of the high heavens above him. "There is your answer to the warning I have taken from the dead man's hand. I send you back the answer from the dead man's grave."

As if in solemn witness of his pledge and as if to carry his answer on their tempest tossed boughs, a great wind rushed through the magnificent forest as John Fane spoke.

But Fane was no idler.

Now that the battle with the bandits had begun he was all attention to duty.

He was a pattern of a young, hard-fighting, self-reliant man, out to do a terrible duty as quickly as possible.

"Black Pete's or my life will depart from our ensanguined bodies before this grotesque struggle is over. I am handicapped I know by one thing. Black Pete knows me but I have never seen his face. The only time I ever saw him was when he wore a mask. *Masked rider* as he is, I will meet and over-power him. And I will also search to its depths the dreaded *mystery of grizzly gulch*. I am going to that spot where I saw the shadowy curling smoke if I have to wade in blood knee deep in which to do it," mused Fane.

Fane thought of the missing stage-coach, of the pretty face of Jane Martin, of One-Eyed Dell, the stage-coach driver, and the obscure, unaccountable disappearance of the coach and its living freight; but while his heart cried to solve this dark secret, he knew that his duty was first to accomplish the extermination of the guerrilla gang led by Black Pete, and the no less infamous Nort Bonair.

"While no one seems to know that the dim smoke that one sees from this road has any connection with the outlaws, I think that it has. I am going to find the source of that thin, stream, of curling smoke, like a spidery indicator pointing toward the sky, if I lose my life in so doing."

Then memory sent a message through his brain.

The words of One-Eyed Dell came to Fane.

"They's been a hundred men who has seen that smoke and has started down the canyon ter whar et comes from; they searches an' they searches an' they never find no smoke."

Thus had spoken One-Eyed Dell who knew his North-West as well as a New Yorker knows his New York.

"It will be the one-hundredth-and-one man, who will start to solve the mystery and will succeed," muttered Fane, as he plunged into the dark forest intent upon his duty.

Through the woods as he progressed there came a sound of a heavy body.

Crashing through the forest at a slinging trot came a great hulk.

Under its ponderous weight the smaller sapplings were trodden deep under foot. The bulk was making straight for Fane.

He had no time to raise his rifle and take a quick shot at the oncoming shape.

"What is it?" Fane thought.

The queer bulk came forward at a shambling gallop. The body of the strange beast was round, compact, and short. Its neck was also short and thick.

The thing had horns with blades that were suggestive of a cutting capacity, and its body was brownish-black, and its weight was easily more than a thousand pounds.

"An elk, the great so-called moose of the North-West!" cried Fane.

This was the beast that was charging directly at him.

He well knew his danger.

A single stroke of the animal's forefeet would kill him, he knew. If it got within striking distance Fane knew that a painful death awaited him.

Hemmed in as he was in a dense thicket of shrubs, which to him meant impossibility of movement, to the elk it meant merely nothing. His great strength and huge body made it easy to crush down the bushes and reach Fane before he could possibly escape.

Fane turned to escape. But his foot caught on a fallen tree limb.

He staggered, and then made an involuntary wild plunge directly under the hoofs of the angry beast, and with a loud cry Fane gave himself up for lost.

How he escaped he never could explain.

He felt the wind rush by him as the creature charged over him. He felt the hot breath of the elk upon his cheek.

The animal raised itself up to strike Fane with its deadly forefeet.

Instinct rather than calculation gave Fane courage. His hand hurried to his belt.

He drew like a flash his trusty Bowie knife. He raised himself on his elbow and made a long ripping

stroke at the grayish white belly of the animal that was directly over him.

As in a dream he felt that he was the center of a terrible combat. The animal was plunging above him trying to wreak deadly vengeance upon the man-thing that had stabbed it. The forefeet of the brute came down with the regularity of a trip-hammer in its mad effort to strike a killing blow that would tear to the vitals of the prostrate man underneath it.

Its heavy head which kept it from seeing distinctly all that lay beneath it, alone saved Fane.

His clothing was torn. He was ripped by painful cuts all over his body. His blood flowed fast, but with the intensity of despair Fane ripped and cut away with his knife at the huge bulk that topped over him.

The elk's life-blood mingled with that of the intrepid young Constable.

The scene was a harrowing one of blood, dirt and dire agony, and in the few moments that it lasted Fane lived a thousand deaths and lives.

Drops of perspiration fell from his form like rain. His face was deadly white with the agony of the struggle.

Around the woods the man and beast spun. Now Fane regained his footing to be hurled to the ground again by the sheer weight of the maddened animal.

Again he reached upward as the elk charged over him and ripped a long red-blood mark with his keen knife across the animal.

"I am lost," thought Fane. "I can stand this fight no longer. I can not touch a vital spot with my knife."

Fane's strength was now nearly gone. He raised himself for one effort and in absolute hopeless desperation he gave one grand, final upward lunge.

What was this?

The elk was staggering hither and thither.

Bloody foam appeared welling from its nostrils.

Ah!

The elk had fallen to its knees. The splendid Bowie knife, after all, had found the beating life of the animal. The elk sank to the ground.

Weak, staggering with faltering steps, Fane rushed behind the elk. He managed feebly to bestride its tremendous shape.

One desperate cut the young Constable made across the animal's big throat.

The knife sank deep. A gush of blood followed the last cast of the exhausted man.

The elk turned on its side. It made one last effort to raise. Its little eyes gleamed for one second with deadly hate; then the glaze of death came over them.

The animal gave a gasp.

It rolled over on its side dead.

Across the animal hero of this great battle fell the human victor in a dead faint.

Human nature had stood the test over the nature of

the brute and while death sealed the fate of the animal, the man, with many painful wounds, utterly spent with the combat, fell on his face, a mere inert mass, while from a crag above that had given a clear view of the combat, Black Pete laughed in mad hate at the prostrate foe.

Black Pete raised his rifle.

"One shot and the end of Constable Fane comes," he cried. "No! I will not shoot. A bullet hole might create trouble for me in that hound Mounted Policeman's body. I will snuff out his life with my knife. One more cut will do the business the elk almost accomplished. No one will see, if that dog is ever found, that a knife wound let out his life, among the many cuts the elk so opportunely gave him."

Drawing his knife Black Pete, the outlaw, stole softly down to cut out the heart of his foe, the insensible John Fane,

CHAPTER VI.

ONE-EYED DELL WINS OUT.

"There is something moving toward us."

"Whar?"

Jane Martin, after she had spoken, indicated with her finger the spot where she had seen a strange commotion in the forest.

One-Eyed Dell, the stage-coach driver tried to follow the direction indicated by the girl's white taper finger.

"I guess the movin' thing is that thar Mounted Policeman, isn't it?" One-Eye snapped after he had tried hard to see down into the valley that lay beneath the winding road where he was halting the coach to await the return of John Fane.

"Well I was probably mistaken," cried Jane. "It was no doubt only the wind making the branches of the trees in the forest nod. How lovely it is here out in this wonderful country."

One-Eye nodded approvingly.

"Ut's a grand country," he asserted with a nod of his head. "I cain't fer the life o' me see how them people in them cities live."

"What do you mean?" asked Jane merrily.

"I mean them poor folk cooped up in them great cities."

"Did you ever go to a city?"

"Oncet. I took a spell off of a drivin' this coach, and I went to Nome on a visit."

"Like it?"

"Not much. Say, thar was a heap more people in that thar minin' town that I seed every day than I see

in a year out hyar. Say, they was thet thick thet I went a bumpin' down a street whar they was more 'an a hundred men and more than twenty wimmen all a walkin' along—say I was thet scared."

"Scared? What at? The women?"

"Naw. But thar wasn't no chanct fer a feller ter breath. Why, gal, I was afeered ter walk fer fear I'd git into a gun-fight with some o' them chaps. With so many on 'em about I didn't feel thet I could move my arm to git me gun 'thout a hittin' some one as I done so, and thar's nothin' to spoil yar aim so as a feller right at yer elbow when you makes a quick jump fer yer gun."

Jane laughed.

"Is all you think about confined to 'a quick jump for your gun?'"

"Wall no! But a man's gotter be handy with his weepins ef ye are goin' ter live yer full span o' life and I don't want no country fer mine whar there's going to be no interference wen I pulls my gun. The 'tother chap might not be interfered with quite so much, and I aint ready to cash in my red-chips jest yit."

"Out here then it's different," smiled Jane.

"You bet. Ef a feller had a little argymint with another feller and jest nat'rally appealed ter his gun ter settle it, thar aint no crowd o' men and wimmin about to stop his work. He kin git his gun clean like and I ain't puttin' up no bluff when I say thet I kin git mine mighty quick."

"Well, that is so. I was born out here on the frontier."

"War ye? Whar do ye live?"

"Up at Herschel Island. My father is there now. My mother is dead."

"Is yar dad in business thar—don't seem to me I know his name."

"He is a whaler. Has been in the Arctic for two years on a whaling trip. I was living in the United States with relatives when he wrote to have me come out and pass the winter with him."

"Ever been to Herschel Island?"

"Not since I was a child."

"I was thar oncet. It ain't no great shakes of a place fer a girl ter live in—but seein' yer dad has sent fer ye, 'taint none o' my bizziness ter butt in. Only from what I hear thar's better places ter live than thet thar island in the winter time."

"I guess I can stand it. I don't expect to remain only until next spring."

"I guess that will be about long enough. But it may be better'n when I was thar five er six year ago. Ye see I only drive eighty-four miles from Fort McPherson to La Pierre House."

"How do I go on from where you stop?"

"This stage only runs in the summer. You have to

take a portage on 'after ye reach Porcupine River a goin' on ter the island."

"How do I get from La Pierre House to the Porcupine River portage?"

"Oh, ye will hev to go on with dogs and guides. I suppose yer dad will meet ye at La Pierre House, won't he?"

"I suppose he will."

"Well, I suppose he'll take ye via Rampart House, an on up ther Herschel River—say, gal, ye have all told about five hundred miles of almost trackless wilderness to cover. I aint sayin' I'm sorry fer ye, but it is some trip for a gal."

"Oh, I'm young and strong. So far I've had a lot of fun, and I guess I can stand it."

"Do ye know this yar Constable Fane?"

"No. I never saw him before I got into this coach at Fort McPherson."

"Say, he seems to me ter be a likely fightin' man—he's got ter be in the game he has stumped up again."

"He seems to be able to take care of himself."

"He's gotter know that trick ef he don't want ter fill an unmarked grave. Tryin' conclusions with that thar Black Pete is some contract."

Before the girl could answer, Kittigazuit, the Eskimo maid, who was attending Jane spoke up briefly.

"Some people come; through wood. See?"

Her English was a bit disjointed but when she pointed down between two big trees, One-Eye trained his single eye in the direction and gave a start of fear and wrath as he did so.

"Men," he cried. "We are a goin' ter be stuck up by Black Pete and his gang."

As he spoke there was now plainly seen a number of crouching men dashing up the steep glade.

They came so rapidly that almost in a second they were within an easy rifle shot of the watchers.

"Look!" cried Jane. "They are men and they are masked."

"*The Masked Riders*," groaned One-Eye.

"Who are the Masked Riders?" questioned Jane.

"Black Pete's gang," replied One-Eye. "They gits thar name because they usually ride on thar horses masked, but this trip they are a comin' on afoot to attack us. But them fellers still wear the masks."

"What are they?"

"Outlaws of the wust type in this year territory."

Jane turned deathly white.

"Outlaws!" she whispered! "What can we do?"

"Kin ye shoot a gun?" whispered One-Eye now trembling with excitement.

"Of course. Wasn't I born out in this country?"

"Hev ye got one?"

"Yes."

"Produce it."

Jane whirled round with her back to him. She

extracted a revolver from some inner safe-deposit place.

"Here is my gun," she cried her cheeks aflame now with color and with her eyes snapping in anticipation of the battle.

One-Eye snatched the revolver from Jane's hand.

It was a beautiful magazine revolver of large caliber.

"Gosh!" cried One-Eye, "Ain't thet a beauty. Whar did ye git it?"

"I bought it East before I started away."

There was admiration and respect for Jane in the single eye of One-Eye as he handed back the shining weapon.

"Ye certain sure are a frontier gal," he snapped.

"Ye hev picked out a weepin thet will do good work ef ye has the heart ter use it when it is time ter git her a-goin'. Say, gal, ye had better let me take thet gun and ye take mine. Thet thar weepin will do the better execution in my hands it seems ter me. Ye can get thar with my old gun which aint no magazine weepin but will shoot as long as ye pull the trigger till it's empty. I kin pump a lot o' lead out o' this gun o' yourn and just now it looks ter me thet the best weepin in the party ought ter be held by the man o' the crowd, fer its mighty sure thar's goin' to be some shootin' soon."

Jane, nothing loath, exchanged revolvers with One-Eye.

She felt that the stage-coach driver was right.

"It's better that way I think myself," she replied.

"But I will try and bring no disgrace upon this weapon, One-Eye."

"Bless yer pretty head," the driver answered. "I knew ye wouldn't. I am thet fond of that thar weepin I'd hate ter see it in a coward's hands. Thar's six notches in the handle o' thet gun which tells its own story. Six times when I needed it most did that thar gun stand me in fer me life. I aint goin' ter let it git away from me arter it did thet work fer me, and I wants yer to throw no discredit on me when them fellers gits me."

"Here; men come," put in Kittigazuit.

Eskimo to the core she spared words until it was time to talk.

"Get around behind them," cried the leader of the outlaws, who was no other than Black Pete himself. "Nort, you lead a party round behind the coach. Take them both ways."

The bandits were in force.

There were at least fifteen or twenty of the thugs that swarmed up from the valley below as if they were so many fiends coming out of the bottomless pit.

"Git ready, thar!" yelled One-Eye to Jane.

"No shots, remember," yelled Nort Bonair. "We want this crowd alive."

Jane braced herself for the shock.

One-Eye his single orb inflamed and deadly with the seething rage that oppressed him raised his weapon to fire.

"Here you, Big Ed, jump in and tie up that girl," cried Black Pete, with a bitter oath.

A tall, rangy outlaw separated himself from the others and ran at Jane.

He grasped her by the arm.

She wrenched herself free.

The thug made a wild grab at the supple young form of the girl.

His huge hand wrenched the girl's long veil from her face and shoulders.

A cry of admiration burst from the lips of Black Pete.

"Hully gee!" he yelled, "ain't she a beauty? She's mine, Big Ed, you be careful and not hurt her."

A foul oath came from the sullied lips of the crime-stained bandit as he motioned Big Ed to close in upon the frightened girl.

The words nerved the hand of Jane.

She remembered the revolver in her hands.

Big Ed made another fierce motion to imprison the girl in his hairy arms.

One-Eye threw back his hand to shoot.

But before he could do so, Jane brought her gun up to her eye.

She pressed the trigger.

There was a whirling of arms, a wild choking cry and Big Ed fell backward, dead, still clutching the veil he had wrenched from the courageous girl.

"Jump inter the coach!" shouted One-Eye with all his lung power.

Hardly knowing what she did, the girl obeyed.

Kittigazuit was crouching in the bottom of the coach, her face an ashen olive hue and her little beady eyes twinkling with fear.

Another bandit was trying to climb into the coach door from the other side as Jane entered.

Instinctively her hand arose,

She pressed the fatal trigger of her weapon.

With its sharp report that almost deafened her, fired as the revolver was in the confined space within the coach, she saw a whirl of an arm, and the bandit relaxed his hold on the coach door. As the vehicle started forward with a great bang, and a jolting grind of wheels, Jane fainted in the arms of Kittigazuit, dropping One-Eye's revolver out of the open door; while on the top of the weaving, dashing, hurtling coach, One-Eye yelled like a man crazed with excitement; his whip with its long lash writhed and hissed, and fell upon the tender backs of his four fleet horses, which at the stentorian command of their driver literally lifted the wheels of the heavy coach in the air and at a terrific burst of mad effort went charging along the narrow trail in a splendid long series of leaps and bounds that reminded One-Eye of the great leaps a

Rocky, Mountain lion takes when about to spring upon its prey.

"Run, gol darn ye, run!" yelled One-Eye as his practiced hands again grasped the familiar ribbons that he used to guide his flying bronchos.

"Thar ain't no hõss thet any o' Black Pete's gang ever rode thet kin ketch this lot o' four-in-hands."

The yells of rage of the outwitted bandits came upon their startled ears behind the flying coach.

Flash! Bang!

The outlaws had opened fire upon the coach.

Oaths floated upon the air. Wild yells of rage seemed to cleave the sky as the hellish band sent shot after shot after the coach.

A shot struck One-Eye.

His cry of pain echoed in the affrighted ears of Jane, who had now recovered from her swoon.

Amid the roaring of the wheels of the dashing coach she felt the body of the unfortunate stage-driver sink down into the center of his seat above her on the frail roof of the vehicle.

"My God!" cried the girl, "One-Eye has been shot. The coach is being rushed forward at the mercy of the maddened horses. We will all be dashed to pieces. One-Eye has lost the reins!"

The girl spoke truly.

The reins to the four frightened bronchos were dangling from the backs of the flying steeds whence they had slipped when the shot tore into the body of One-Eye.

With a great precipice ahead of the running horses, with the coach bounding forward, every moment apparently being the last it possibly could keep in an upright position, the plight of Jane Martin was one that it would seem, could not but end in dreadful disaster.

Yet with his blood making a great pool around him, One-Eyed Dell "had won out." He had saved the coach and its cargo from falling into the hands of the outlaws, but would his ruse end in a horrible crashing fall of the swaying vehicle over the steep sides of the canyon toward which the flying horses were dragging it?

CHAPTER VI.

A BRAVE WOMAN.

Jane Martin was almost paralyzed with fear.

Kittigazuit, the Eskimo woman, kneeled in the bottom of the coach and muttered incantations and charms from the folk-lore of her Farthest North tribe.

"We be kill," she sobbed to Jane.

"I fear there is no hope," the frightened girl answered.

"Road he wind down, deep down; then come great canyon."

Jane understood.

"You mean the road winds down the canyon, until near the bottom it skirts a tremendous precipice, down which we must dash unless the horses are stopped."

"Iss."

"But how can we stop four frightened, untamed, runaway bronchos?" wailed Jane.

"No stop; all die."

Somehow this utter giving up to fate so characteristic of the Indian nation, without a struggle to save one's self, grated on the white sensibilities of Jane.

She had the blood of a long line of fighting men, and brave frontier women in her veins; and so she rose to the situation as the white race always does when waging a losing game; while the Indian only is dominant while winning.

"Die!" cried Jane. "Die, like a rat in a trap? To be whirled crashing over the brow of a deep, terrible canyon, to go whirling down, down, in fear and horrid fright, clear down from crag to crag, to land a bloody dismembered dying heap of bloody bones and crushed flesh, down at the bottom of the gulch? Never, without a fight to save my life!"

The blood rushed to Jane's face. Her eyes flashed.

Yet the whirling, bounding coach turned her sick and faint.

When she looked out she could see by the sudden rushing away from her of the scenery that the horses were increasing rather than diminishing their speed.

Then a plan flashed into Jane's brain.

She crept to a standing position.

"Help me up, Kittigazuit," Jane shouted so as to be heard over the roaring of the flying coach.

Kittigazuit was transfixed by fear. She only mumbled vain Eskimo prayers, and rolled her eyes up until Jane was forced to laugh in spite of her danger.

"Oh brace up, you idiot!" cried Jane. "You look like a chocolate colored character doll as you roll your beady eyes like a frightened rat and call upon your Eskimo Gods to help you. There's nothing doing in that line."

The Eskimo woman blinked and whimpered but she pulled herself up to a sitting position and managed to show some slight signs of life.

"That's better," went on Jane. "You look almost human, now."

"What Missy want?" snuffled Kittigazuit.

"Help me up," replied Jane.

The Eskimo assisted Jane to a standing position.

"Help me take off my short-hunting skirt," the girl commanded. "I have a bloomer suit on underneath of deer-skin."

In a trice the change was completed.

Jane stood revealed, a lithe boyish little figure, but with the soft rounded curves of young womanhood.

Her bloomers, and long leggins made a sort of uniform and she was the picture of health and self-reliant young Americanism, as she finally grasped the sides of the coach, and not now incommoded with her short skirt, was free to twine herself about the central seat of the coach, and thus steady herself for her next move.

"Now, Kittigazuit," ordered Jane. "Open the door of the coach."

The Eskimo had managed by this time to gather some of her scattered wits and she gasped but obeyed without argument.

The coach was still speeding along at a wonderful pace.

The released door banged against the side of the coach until the Eskimo managed to reach out and hold it back.

Jane Martin without a word fearlessly stepped down upon the wide shelf-like steps that ran along the side of the coach.

She grasped the side of the coach clinging to the door-sill for the flying scenery that greeted her wondering eyes, turned her faint in a breath.

But she had heard some where that if one is scaling a mountain never to look down but always upward.

Accordingly the brave girl, glanced up to the drifting sky above her and the dizzy faintness passed away as if by magic.

"Now, Kittigazuit," yelled Jane so that the Eskimo could hear her voice over the dreadful din, "Good bye!"

As she spoke Jane edged herself out along the shelf-like step, and in a moment had left the shelter of the stage door-sill and was hanging by her eye-lids, so as to write, upon the outside of the coach.

"I must cling to the coach as a bat does to a wall," muttered Jane, as she dug her fingers into the varnish of the coach as she hung on to a hand-hold placed there to assist passengers in mounting up to the top of the coach.

"Now can I reach the next step?" she said, "Yes."

Her face glowed in triumph.

Just then the coach struck a big rock, careened on two wheels and seemed about to go over.

Jane screamed in agony.

Her body was flung at right angles to the coach, but in some way she managed to hang on to her refuge spot.

Her tender flesh was bruised as her form struck the side of the coach as it righted itself in a Providential way, and the girl felt the blood ooze from her finger tips so great was the pressure with which she was grasping the hand-hold.

"Can I do it?" Jane whispered. "My God, I must."

If I can not we are surely to be crushed in an awful fall down the canyon."

Jane edged herself along inch by inch.

Like a fly she crept up the side of the sawing coach, and at length she reached the top where she screamed in terror as she saw One-Eye, his face massed in blood, and his one eye staring sightlessly upward in senseless wonder.

"One-Eye!" Jane shouted, "Are you alive?"

No answer came from the white face, and Jane knowing that her mission was only half done decided to make her last stand for life not only for herself but for One-Eye and the Eskimo woman.

She looked over the scene.

The coach was half way down the mountain now.

The turn at the road was only a few hundred feet away and Jane saw a great heap of rocks in the road which made the prospect hideous.

Then Jane accomplished the bravest act of her life.

She stood up, weaving backwards and forwards, upon the dashboard of the jumping, sliding, bounding coach.

For a moment she stood there poised, a beautiful statue of action.

Then she launched herself into space.

Her bold leap was finely calculated.

She described a half-circle in the air, and then she alighted on the back of the nearest horse, almost on her face, but well across the animal.

Jane now was only a bundle of steel-coiled nerves.

She grasped the mane of the horse with a frantic grip.

She pulled herself astride of the animal.

Her heels dug into his sides, for without skirts she was as free in movement as a boy would have been.

Her hands then caught up the flying reins which One-Eye had dropped when he was shot, and she tore at the mouths of the horses, through the ribbons she held, and sawed right and left with the fierce energy of despair.

The horse Jane bestrode was sure that a devil had come out of the sky and mounted him when he felt the sudden impact as she jumped upon his back.

He snorted and plunged in his effort to escape but the steady sawing at his bit, and the drumming of girlish heels upon his side, soon began to have an effect.

The other horses were also feeling the sawing, dragging motion Jane was flashing along the reins, and soon their pace began to slacken.

The heavy drag upon their mouths was telling among all four maddened beasts.

There was command in the steady sawing. The horses began to feel again the iron hand of discipline.

The beast that Jane was riding decided to stop.

He began pulling back against his companions.

Then some one put on the foot-brake.

Jane glanced back to the top of the coach.

There sat Kittigazuit with her foot pressing the brake.

She had followed her mistress up the perilous path along the side of the flying coach.

The combined work of the two girls was soon beginning to tell.

A sort of sympathy in action seemed to come to all the four horses at once.

With a series of snorts and plunges, with foam streaming from every nostril, with sweat pouring from their bodies, the four horses with one or two more plunges came to a halt, scattered all over the road to be sure, but safe, and under control once more; but Jane shuddered as she motioned to Kittigazuit to jump from her perch and run to the heads of the leaders, to keep them from bolting again.

"My God!" whispered Jane to herself, "we are only a few feet from the horrible precipice. Had I not stopped the horses right here, in three more seconds we would have been dashed to bits down that terrible steep."

Jane cried to the Eskimo to stay at the heads of the horses and then ran back to aid One-Eye.

She climbed up on the top of the coach.

At her feet lay her own revolver which she had given One-Eye in exchange for his just before the attack of the bandits.

Jane stuck the revolver in her waist-belt and then, she turned to help One-Eye.

Her glance swept the valley below, and she shuddered—why, what was this?

Not ten feet away she saw a gigantic elk lying dead.

Across the body of the animal lay a figure that she well knew. Her heart almost stopped beating.

"It's John Fane!" cried the girl.

Jane placed her revolver further in her belt, made a flying leap from the coach, and in ten seconds was leaning over Fane.

"My God!" she whispered. "He is dead."

CHAPTER VII.

A FIENDISH PLOT.

Jane felt of Fane's heart.

She gave a cry of joy.

It was faintly beating.

"No! He is not dead," the girl cried, with the note of thanksgiving in her voice.

Her cries seemed to arouse the man from his semi-conscious state.

Fane opened his eyes.

"Where am I?" he asked. "In Heaven?"

"Nonsense," gasped Jane, with a blush, "if lying across a dead elk is Heaven, then you're in it."

At this Fane sat up.

"I remember now," he said.

"Remember what?" asked the girl.

"The fight."

"What fight?"

"The fight with the elk."

"Do you mean to tell me that you had a fight with this dead elk?"

"I do."

"Did you kill him?"

"I don't know."

"Why don't you know?"

"All I remember was that the beast attacked me. I had no time to use my gun."

"What did you use?"

"My knife."

Fane waved his Bowie knife as he spoke which he found he still grasped.

"Do you mean to tell me that you killed that elk with your knife?"

"Guess so. I don't really know. I remember the animal charged me."

"Then what happened?"

"He knocked me down."

"Oh, go on."

Jane was excited now at the picture Fane presented to her mind by his words.

"There is not much more to tell."

"Yes, there is. You told me that the elk knocked you down. Now what happened after that?"

"I don't know."

"But you must know."

"Really I do not. I only know that I drew my knife because I felt how hopeless it was for me to escape, and then I don't remember very much except that I cut, thrust and stabbed."

"You cut at the animal, this gigantic elk with your knife?"

"It seems to me that I did. I don't really know."

Jane walked around the huge animal.

Its bulk made her cringe. Its horrid antlers with the whole blade-like spears that radiated from them, made her shudder.

She could see all over the body of the animal numberless deep stab wounds. She knew these were made by Fane's deadly knife and her heart warmed to the young man.

"You are a wonder," Jane remarked. "You are safe alone in your class and you are the head and front of your class at that."

"Maybe I'm my own foot also," replied Fane with a feeble smile.

"You are the whole thing. This is the first time that I ever knew a man armed only with a Bowie knife to

kill with that knife, a full grown elk, a very dangerous animal at this season of the year. And I may add a dangerous enemy at all seasons of the year."

Fane turned pink.

"I guess I didn't know anything about the danger," he said. "I heard some large animal threshing about through the woods——"

"Didn't you get your rifle ready when you first heard the noise?"

"I am afraid I didn't. I was watching for the noise to make more of a noise, when out of the woods this creature darted. He didn't give me time to do anything else, because he rushed me and knocked me down in a jiffy."

"Where was your rifle, man?"

"On my back, strapped there you know, by my rifle belt."

"Where were your revolvers?"

"In my belt."

"With a rifle and two revolvers do you mean to tell me that you let this chap charge you and knock you down?"

Fane's face was very red now.

"I am afraid I did," he meekly replied.

"Well, you need a guardian up in these woods. You sure are a tenderfoot, I see. No Western man or North-Western man would hear a noise in a strange wood without getting his weapons ready. You——"

"Do you think I need a guardian?"

"I do."

"Why don't you take the job?"

Jane looked at the young man. Her face turned as pink as his. She smiled; then she laughed.

"Don't get gay," she replied, "when I take up a guardianship I don't want the job of guarding a young man, who will let a bull elk charge out of the woods at him, without being ready with his weapons."

Fane looked chagrined.

Jane immediately softened the sting in her words.

"But if I do take up the guardianship of a young man at any time," she continued, "it will be of one that isn't afraid to fight a bull elk, when he is charged by one, even if he didn't know that shooting the brute was better than killing him by inches with stab wounds—and thus, possibly, suddenly losing my guardianship."

"I suppose that you would be glad to lose it?"

"Maybe I would; maybe I wouldn't," rejoined the girl with a charming smile, "but while we talk silly things here, your wounds need attending to and its sure there is some attention deserving poor One-Eyed Dell, who has a bullet in him some where placed there by Black Pete's gang of outlaws."

"What? One-Eye shot?"

"Oh, yes, I forgot that you didn't know all about it."

Jane then related to Fane all of the facts of the at-

tack upon the coach by the bandits, the running fight, and the wounding of One-Eyed.

"When One-Eyed fell what became of the horses?" asked Fane.

"They bolted."

"Who stopped them?"

Jane who had tried to say nothing as to her own deeds was then forced step by step to give a halting, imperfect description of the wonderful scene she had figured in, in its way more wonderful than the scene that Fane had been the hero of.

"By thunder," cried Fane, with a glance of admiration at the girl, "you are the wonder, this time. It's you that must be praised, not in any way, I."

"Stuff!" replied the girl, "neither of us wanted to do the work we have done. We had it put up to us and we had to make good to live. If you thought about most deeds that thrill one in just the hearing of them you will see that this is all there is to it—the situation came up, and the unlucky one there had to either fish or dig bait, eh?"

Fane nodded.

"That's about all there is to it. But aside from that did you ever think how this country is liable to make one do things like you have done? I ought to be dead from the cuts I have received. But instead of it I am feeling very well, thank you."

"The rarified air has caused your blood to coagulate, and save for the flesh wounds no vital part of your anatomy has been touched."

"You see I only need a few bandages to fix me up in pretty good shape again."

"And I wish I had some witch-hazel or something of that kind and I also would feel very good."

Unsteadily, at first, Fane arose, but soon he began to regain his best strength.

In a short space he had torn up his outer shirt of soft flannel and had bound up his more painful wounds.

The girl also had repaired some of the general damages she had suffered, and the couple then walked slowly back to the coach, each being rather weak and neither hurrying much—a cause for some wonderment in the old, but none at all in the younger generation.

"The attack by Black Pete and his gang on the coach, will certainly be repeated," Fane said at length.

"I fear so."

"They are bound to kill me."

"Of course! What did you think they were bound to do? Let you arrest them?"

"You are practical to say the least."

"Why not? I was born out this way. I know my great far North-West well. It's a country for real men, with red, fighting blood in their hearts. Here, that they may live, men fight to kill with real weapons.

East, men fight with money, to get some other man's money away from him."

"Both roads lead to the same thing."

"What is that?"

"If you don't shoot an enemy out here, you die. If some one gets your money East, you die also of starvation."

"Don't see the application."

"Well, there isn't any intense application, only, as I said before, you die East or West, North or South, if you don't win the battle of bullets or the battle of five dollar bills."

"I fancy that is right," replied Jane.

"We must hurry back to the coach," added Fane, seeing that the sun showed it was late in the afternoon. "We can't wait longer or we may get back too late; Black Pete may have attacked the coach ere this."

"No danger of that. If he had we would have heard him."

But Jane accelerated her pace and soon the couple reached the coach.

To their surprise, One-Eye was sitting up with a bandage around his head although looking pale and wan.

"How in the world did you recover so quickly?" asked Jane, when One-Eye had hailed them with a shout of triumph.

"This thar Kittigazuit, although an Eskimo, is pretty nigh as good er surgeon ez some o' them chaps wot think they are the whole cheese because they have a dée-ploomee from some Eastern collidge," explained One-Eye. "Arter ye was gone, thar, Jane, arter your young man here, this Eskimo she gin' me a hooker o' good stuff outen a flask, and then she fines thet the bullet hed a hit me on the temple a glancin' blow, and knocked what little sense I had outen my head. But I was all right outisde o' thet. So I sits up—"

Just then Jane remembered that she was looking like a fascinating boy.

She made one clutch for the place her skirt ought to be.

"Good' gracious!"

With these two words she vanished into the depths of the coach.

But she turned her head long enough to remark something more.

"He isn't my 'young man', One-Eye, if you please!" she chortled.

"Then I am indeed out of luck," answered John Fane as the girl dodged back to add the usual feminine skirt to her trim figure.

One-Eye winked in a most mysterious fashion and then he dodged around to his horses and soon had things ship-shape again.

"Say, boy," One-Eye cried to Fane. "We got out

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MYSTERY OF THE WHIRLING SMOKE.

of thet scrape mighty lucky. But boy, ef we aint a gittin' ours later, I'll miss my guess."

"Do you mean that you think Black Pete will attack us again?"

"Thet's just what I do mean. They aint goin' to quit us, my boy, not while John Fane is in this territory alive."

"Why did they not jump us when we were defenceless, and could not fight back?"

"Onccommon is the desperado heart. I don't know. They may have had er lot o' reasons, thet we don't know of, but thet they ain't through with us yer can bet."

* * * * *

One-Eyed Dell did not know that there had been a conference of the renegade gang and that although Black Pete was hot for an immediate pursuit and avenging of the death of his men, and Nort Bonair was equally as decided on this point, the majority of the bandits had ruled against further attack.

"You gits the gal, thet's enough fer you," cried one of the gang to Black Pete, "and then Nort Bonair gits the treasure box on the coach, and ye two divide the gal and the cash about as ye see fit. We fellers git nuttin but the bag to hold. Nit! No runnin' into dangers yit. Things ez got so in this yar gang there aint nuttin to it but fer the leaders."

Black Pete swore a mighty oath at the speaker.

"What is it to you if I do marry this girl?" he cried. "She's a good looker and will make me a good wife when I get her tamed."

"When?" cried another bandit.

"When, what?" asked Black Pete.

"When ye git that girl tamed she will make a good wife, eh? Sure, but it's going to be some trouble in taming her. I'd as soon try to marry a she-tiger, as thet girl agin' her will."

The gang roared.

"I'll attend to the taming part," replied Black Pete.

"You're welcome to the job," cried the first speaker.

"But what do we propose to do with the Constable, that is making so much trouble out here?"

Black Pete told his reasons for not assassinating Fane at once.

The reasons were looked upon as excellent by the gang.

"But something has got to be done," Nort Bonair said.

"Sure," cried Black Pete.

"Why don't you do that something?"

"Don't you fear, I ain't dead yet."

"Get busy or this gang will think you are a dead one."

Black Pete drew nearer to the crowd.

His next plan for the death of Fane was whispered through his set teeth, in a low hiss of hatred.

"O-a-h!"

A groan of amazement went thus through the gang when the bandit chief had finished.

"Talk about cruelty?" cried Bonair, "Boys, hats off to Black Pete. He is King of us all when it comes to planning an agonizing death for John Fane, Constable in the Royal North-West Mounted Police."

The outlaws roared their appreciation of the horrible picture that Black Pete had brought to their minds.

"Wall, wot ye goin' to do now?" half an hour later, One-Eyed Dell asked of John Fane. "Ye are the com-man-deer of this hyar exp-ee-dition, an' I as the only male private in the ranks are ready ter obey."

"You are a wonder," cried Jané Martin, pertly. "They have cut the word obey out of the marriage service and I thought that they had also cut it out of the dictionary."

Fane laughed.

"I would like a photograph of the husband that would make you obey," rejoined Fane.

"So would I," replied Jane, as she stuck her tongue out at him.

One-Eye had meanwhile watched the two in great amusement.

"You two people remind me of a couple o' darned kittens a purrin' round each other as ye are. Say, you make me sick."

"Try Old Crow water for that sick feeling," replied Jane as she disappeared in the depths of the coach.

Fane smiled.

"Have you fed the horses?" he asked.

"Yes."

"We have just managed to eat something ourselves."

"Sure. With the feelin' all the time thet some darned outlaw was a goin' to shoot at us. Say, I don't figger on likin' my meals thet way. They give me indigestion alwaws, ef I cant eat without feelin' thet some feller is a goin' ter shoot at me from the bushes; Black Pete's gang will shoot at ye from any onexpected place."

"Now, One-Eye, I have a plan."

"Come over with it, John Fane, I'm listin' hard."

"You remember that before all these interruptions I had this same plan in my mind?"

"Do ye call a run-in thet nearly cost ye yer life 'an interruption'?"

John laughed.

"Never mind what I call it. The interruption at least came near to being a permanent one, didn't it?"

"I should guess yes. But go on an' tell me of yer plan, boy."

"Well, its very simple. I propose that you drive on as if you were going to start direct for La Pierre House, but when you get off about five miles you go into camp."

"Hum."

"You can then await me."

"What are ye goin' ter do?"

"Oh, I'm going down into the valley to see if I can get to the bottom of that mystery of the whirling smoke."

"Say, boy, aint ye got fur enough ter the bottom o' the mystery?"

"Certainly not. I haven't got to the bottom of it at all."

"Seems ter me thet I never had no coriosity ter get to the bottom o' a hornet's nest when I seen the hornets buzzin' about the nest. Somehow I lost interest bout them."

"But it wasn't your duty to explore hornets' nests, while in this case it is my duty to explore this nest."

One-Eye scratched his head.

"I didn't figger in no duty part I'll admit," he answered. "I suppose thet when ye puts it all on duty I'll have ter pass. I dont wantter draw no cards ter thet statement. Ye wins hans' down."

"Of course I do."

"But ef I were you, I'd buy some good puppy-food."

"Why?"

"Puppies bark fer it."

"Meaning that I am a tender-foot idiot to go down and try to solve the mystery of the whirling smoke?"

"Sure thing. Say, boy, thet mystery solvin' thet ye are about ter take up, cost the feller whose putrid corpse ye buried this morning, his life, an' I guess he was erbout as likely a chap as ye are. You may call it yer duty. But I tell yer thet ye are a darned fool ter monkey with this mystery."

"But I am going just the same."

"Ye are?"

"Yes."

"Mind made up?"

"Yes."

"Nothing could change ye?"

"Nothing."

One-Eye took off his wide-brimmed hat.

To the utter astonishment of Fane he cast his hat down on the ground in front of him and upon the hat began executing the most marvelous grotesque dance that Fane had ever seen. It was an exaggerated type of a South Sea Islander dancing his head-dance, just before he boils the nearest clergyman in a pot prior to eating thereof.

"W-h-y-w-h-a-t!" questioned Fane.

"Put her thar, poddner," cried One-Eye, as he extended his hand to Fane.

Fane grasped the hand.

"Why all this exhibition of muscular dancing?" he asked. "Why this sudden burst of friendship?"

"Poddner," cried One-Eye impressively. "Thar's a reel man come into this yar territory. I allus acts thet way when I see a real fightin' man a comin' my way. I've tested ye out, an' ye assay an hundred dollas ter the ton, all good ore, and say, poddner, I'm with ye ter the limit. Play this game as high as ye wish. This yar territory has been needin' such a chap as ye fer a considerable spell. You go in an' try ter git behin' thet thar mystery o' the whirlin' smoke. I'm right thar with me chips all the while."

"Do you mean that you will go along with me and get to the bottom of the mystery of the whirling smoke?"

"Thet's just what I do mean."

The two brave men grasped hands and shook each other's arm up and down like two old friends who had just met for the first time in years.

"Say, you boys, break away there and count me in. Skirts and all, here's a girl that is going to go along when that mystery is solved. If it's a bandit trick to keep honest folk away from their haunts, I'm out to find out, boys, and if it is really a ghostly fire as some folks say, I'm ready to shoot up any ghost that ever walked this earth," put in Jane.

"Brave girl," cried Fane.

"Me go 'long too."

All three whirled around.

There stood Kittigazuit, the Eskimo with her fat cheeks pursed out and her eyes making two round circles.

Jane laughed heartily.

"I see the finish of that mystery," she cried, "when this gang get at work on it—but after all, it is a risky journey we are going upon. We may never return from it."

"But better to die than not to accomplish one's life work," cried Fane.

"You are right," answered the girl, "and I think you are going to accomplish your quest in this case."

"I hope so."

"What is your idea of this whirling smoke?"

"I don't know. It is quite as great a mystery to me as it is to you."

"Do you think the outlaws are behind the manifestation?"

"I am at a loss to know."

"Do you know anything about the history of the smoke?"

One-Eye at this point ran to his horses to see if everything was in ship-shape for a start.

The girl and Fane continued their conversation.

"The only thing I know about this smoke is from One-Eye," Fane added.

"What does he say about it?"

"He says that it doesn't always appear to one. Sometimes days and days will go by and there will be nothing in any way to indicate that there is any smoke there."

"Oh."

"Then there will be other days when the smoke can be seen only high in the air. It then seems to be a soft haze-like film hanging over the valley."

"Oh."

"Then at other days the smoke is quite distinct."

"Do you know why this is so?"

"No, I do not."

"It's a mystery, isn't it?"

"Assuredly."

"A grave one."

"Undoubtedly."

"Is the light seen at night?"

"Sometimes."

"Not always?"

"I understand, not always."

"Then it is not always in the day the smoke is seen?"

"Exactly."

"At night the light is some times a soft haze in the sky?"

"Yes."

"Then it is a dark bluish-purple roll of flame-lit margin that seems to flicker hither and thither like a will-o-the-wisp?"

"Just that."

"Does it then seem to disappear?"

"Yes."

Jane was thinking deeply over the problem, Fane saw.

He awaited the time that she was ready to tell him her views. In a way Fane had a great deal of confidence in the good sense of the girl since she had so bravely proved her worth by saving One-Eye, Kittigazuit and herself from falling into the hands of the outlaws.

"Do you know I don't think the pirate-band of hell hounds of Black Pete have anything to do with this matter?"

"Why not?"

"I don't think that they have the ingenuity or the

brains to put up any condition that would produce the result that you have described to me."

"Then to what do you attribute the condition?"

"I frankly confess that I do not know."

Stories told to him in his baby days about ghosts, supernatural beings, men and women who have come back from the dead, and clad in their grave-clothes had played a brief part again in this world, came to Fane's mind.

"And graves have yawn'd and yielded up their dead," he quoted.

Jane took up the quotation.

"The noise of battle hurtled in the air,

Horses did neigh, and dying men did groan;

And ghosts did shriek and squeal about the streets."

When Jane had finished her quotation there was a look of grave trouble on the face of Fane.

"Ghosts or humans, who or whatever made that flaming, whirling smoke," he swore, "I am going down there to find out about it if I never return."

The wind seemed to blow cold from the forest. The sun darted behind a cloud then, as Fane spoke.

Jane and Fane looked from the point where they stood, over to the mystery of the valley.

As they looked the thin column of smoke that was idly whirling up into the sky, came slowly, slowly dancing over to where they stood, and sullenly seemed to point to them, as if in laughter and menace at their intent.

Fane and the girl looked at each other in terror.

"Whar's all this smoke a comin' from," yelled One-Eye, as he dashed back to where the couple stood.

As he spoke a great firebrand, a flaming bush of dry leaves and withered branches fell at the feet of the party.

There was a tremendous explosion, and all around them in every direction a fearful glare of flame burst forth, and darted at them as if to lick the life from their bones.

CHAPTER IX.

THE OUTLAW'S LAST PLOT.

"Well!"

"Well, what?"

Black Pete and Nort Bonair, the two outlaws stood together at the side of a fallen tree, a monarch of the forest, while near them was grouped the bandit gang, when each spoke the foregoing words.

The bandits were well sheltered in the leafy forest from prying eyes.

"Say," Bonair said, "we are not as yet filled with success when we are bound to bring our artless thoughts toward the young policeman, one John Fane."

"Not so you could see it with the naked eye."

"In fact so far the honors seem to be with the copper."

Black Pete swore a bitter oath.

"So far it looks that way, but later it is going to look the other way."

"Now, gentle chief, wouldst elucidate your theory?"

"Oh, stop joking."

"Guying? Why, kind sir, I am not guying, not by a long shot. In fact I was never more serious in my life than I am now."

Black Pete growled out an answer.

"It's all right for you to josh me," he cried, "but let me tell you I am sick, sore, sorry and disgusted."

"Why?"

"To think how that policeman has skipped through our fingers."

"Why say ours?"

"Why shouldn't I?"

"Because he surely has not skipped through my gentle fingers. I was the one who wanted to kill him off hand; you were the one that didn't want him killed, having a fearsome reason in your heart."

"I think I was right yet."

"You are too chicken-hearted to be a chief of men like our band. You ought to hire out to some comic opera and be a comic opera outlaw. They are just about like the real thing as you are."

"Look here, Nort," answered Black Pete, while his eyes began to narrow, and his face to turn white, "that will be about all. I've stood quite enough from your guying disposition."

Nort Bonair was no fool.

He knew when he had carried a joke far enough.

Black Pete was chary of getting into a fight with one of the best of his subordinates, but Nort well knew that it was best not to provoke Black Pete too far; he was "a holy terror" when he got started on what his men called "Black Pete's war-path," and not wishing to die quick, then and there, Nort Bonair hastened to apologize and soothe his irate commander.

"Oh, say, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, Pete," Bonair cried. "I was only fooling at best. Of course you know what's good for the boys, and the boys know this and are satisfied."

"They didn't seem to be satisfied when we talked things over today."

"Oh, you know such things go. There's always the kicker in every bunch of men you or I could get together. In this case they kicked a bit but it didn't amount together anything more than a mere kick."

"If the gang don't hang together——"

"They will hang separately, eh?"

"That's about it."

"There's no one looking for death just yet; don't worry about the boys; they are all right."

"I hope so, for I have a plan that I think will be great——"

"That was the plan you explained to the boys today?"

"Yes."

"But there is one thing more behind that plan."

"What is it?"

"When you find the bodies of Fane, and the rest of the gang with him I want you to put over the charred remains—'Tried by the Fire of Pete Budgell, otherwise known as Black Pete, the outlaw chief.'"

"Great!"

"I think the idea pretty good, myself."

"It's fine."

Bonair burst into loud laughter.

Just now he wished to placate his chief.

"When does the dance of death begin?"

"Just as soon as our spies tell us the party are ready for the fiery ordeal."

"You have watchers out?"

"Spies, I call 'em. What kind of a leader would I be if I had no spy system?"

"Not much of a one, I confess. Have you heard at all from your spies?"

"Only once."

"How?"

"An Indian boy-runner came in from them and reported that John Fane had been rescued by that girl, Jane Martin, after I had supposed I had stabbed him to the heart, while he lay across the body of the dead elk he had fought."

"How in thunder, did you ever bull things up so? Why didn't you kill Fane, when you rushed at him with a knife, and the threat that you would murder him."

"I am darned if I know. I went at him with murder in my heart. If I did not hit him a hundred blows it seemed to me with my knife, I didn't hit him once."

"One real good blow was worth your hundred poor ones."

"I tell you that man bears a charmed life. I don't see how he survived my hate. Do you?"

"Did you examine your knife after you struck Fane with it?"

"No."

"Have you got the knife here?"

"Yes. This is it."

"May I see it?"

"Sure."

Black Pete handed over a long, deadly looking knife to Bonair.

The latter examined it carefully and then returned it to its owner.

"Well?" asked Black Pete.

"Well what?"

"Can't you give me your opinion?"

"My opinion as to what?"

"Why did not that knife kill John Fane?"

"Did you examine the knife after you used it?"

"No."

"Well, examine it now."

With a mystified air Black Pete did as he was requested.

He had not examined the knife for the fraction of a second when he broke out into the foulest of curses. His cries of rage filled the air.

"What do you think of that for hard luck?" yelled Pete. "Someone has been monkeying with my knife."

The knife had been broken off sharp up to the cross-bar that marked the end of the handle and the blade's beginning.

This fact had saved John Fane's life.

For of the hundred murderous blows that had fallen upon his body, when Black Pete tried to wreak his vengeance upon the form of the insensible man, not one had done more than bruise Fane's flesh; the broken blade of the knife had made the stabbing of the Constable an impossibility, which Black Pete, in his terrible rage, had overlooked.

"If I could find the man that fooled with this knife, I would kill him as I would a dog," shrieked Black Pete, when he saw the reason why Fane had escaped when he had tried to assassinate him.

"That's good talk," replied Bonair, "but you will never find him out."

"Why not?"

"I don't think it was any traitor in our band that did it. How long since you have carried that knife?"

"Oh, a couple of weeks."

"Then it might have been used by a dozen men in our band. Someone may have broken it, and put it back fearing your tongue. You know, Pete, the way you lace into a man that doesn't please you is a caution."

"Well, I guess you are right. Anyway, that fooling with my knife seems to have saved John Fane's life. But we'll pass this up this time. Next time he won't escape so easily. There's a lot more to do to him this time than in the other, don't you know?"

"Well, get ahead and tell me. I'm dying to know what new thing in cruelty you have thought up."

"You think I am an adept in cruel plans?"

"No question of that my bold captain. When you get through plotting what a man has to suffer by your plans, will turn my hair gray to watch."

"Well I am going to do this—I am going to burn that gang alive."

"What?"

"Yes. I am going to burn them alive, and I am going to sit on some far crag where I can get a good view of their agony, and watch them die."

"Whew! You make my blood run cold—but before you burn a man don't you think it would be a good idea to catch him, eh?"

"You mean that I must take Fane and his party prisoners before I burn them?"

"That is just what I do mean."

"Well, you need not worry about that. I can beat that idea all to a whisper."

"As how?"

"When my spies report that Fane is in a good position for my purpose I am going to turn out the band and fire the woods in every direction."

"What! My God, man what do you mean?"

"Just that. The gang will set fire to the woods in a dozen different directions and with Fane and his party hemmed in what chance is there for them to escape?"

"Why you are a second Nero. He burned Rome to pleasure him, while you will burn up several million dollars worth of good timber to get the lives of a cheap dollar a day Constable of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, and a worthless girl, and an infernal one-eyed stage-driver who isn't worth ten cents himself, and the whole lot wouldn't bring fifty cents when sold on the block at any slave-market in Asia."

"Oh, rats, the girl would bring good money."

"She might, alive—but when she is dead and in a charred heap of dirty bones and dirt, she won't be worth much to anyone."

"Except with all the party dead who is going to trace to us the unfortunate fire that burned them all up?"

"Not anyone, I suppose."

"And we get rid of the troublesome gang, without danger to ourselves, or in the bringing of the rest of the Canadian government or the Hudson's Bay Company down on our head."

"Then we can rob the next coach?"

"What's the matter with this one?"

"I suppose there's nothing the matter with it."

"I should say not. I have inside information that

there's about three or four hundred thousand dollars in gold coin in the treasure box aboard that coach."

"Impossible!"

"Why is it impossible?"

"If there was big money aboard that coach they would have a guard on top."

"What's the matter with Fane?"

"Huh?"

"He is the guard. He was going up to Herschel Island to the Mounted Police station there and he took the place of the regular guard on the coach."

"Well, you are certain all right. How did you learn that?"

"Never mind. I got the news all right, as you see."

"Yes."

"Then how are you to rob this coach, when you are going to burn it, along with the Fane crowd?"

"Now listen! When the fire is at its hottest and the doomed party in the coach are trying to save their lives by putting out the fire, why, our boys will jump in quietly and run off with the treasure, leaving them to die by the flames and in the thick smoke of a terrible forest fire."

"But suppose they try to flee from the flames with the coach?"

Black Pete straightened up his tall form.

"I have already had every nut unscrewed on each wheel. Two of my Indian warriors, Red-Deer and The Serpent, like two great snakes, have been crawling, crawling, taking advantage of every shelter until they, unobserved, got beneath the coach, and now *no one can move the treasure-laden vehicle without all the rear wheels collapsing. The Fane party can not now escape my vengeance, I am sure. They are doomed to a dreadful death.*"

Nort Bonair gave back a step.

The awful ingenuity of the plot appealed to him.

"Holy Cats!" he cried, "Black Pete, you are a born devilish plotter and are fit to lead the desperadoes you command. Yes, John Fane, Jane Martin, and One-Eyed Dell are doomed to die this time. Ha! Ha! Ha! What a man you are, Black Pete."

CHAPTER X.

THE FIGHT WITH FIRE.

"The flames are hemming us in!" shouted John Fane, as he glanced about him.

"The only way ter fight fire with fire is ter get bizzy," yelled One-Eye, "now ye people watch me git inter the game."

One-Eyed Dell was all energy as he spoke.

He thrust his trembling hand into the pocket of his jacket and drew out a bundle of matches.

He kicked a pile of dry leaves together; threw a top dressing of dry branches upon the pile, and lighted the match with a cry of triumph.

"Back fire is the greatest way o' fitin' fire I ever seen," he said. "Har's some matches. Yer foller me lead, Jane and John, and I guess we may git outen this hyar trouble arter all."

Kittigazuit assisting, the party soon had half a dozen little fires started.

By dint of feeding the flames, soon they had quite a conflagration of their own blazing.

It was a glorious but disheartening sight to watch the flames that were marching through the forest like the advance made by a devouring army of locusts.

Wild beasts soon began to appear.

They were driven away from their haunts by the fury of the seething tempest of glaring light which searched the darkest shadow and made a waste of their deepest lairs.

"Look at that snarling, crouching catamount," cried Jane, as she pointed to a slinking beast, that crept cat-like from the shadow, darted over the road and was lost in the impenetrable gloom of the still standing forest.

"A hulking cat," cried John. "Look at that grizzly bear! He comes slowly, anon looking over his shoulder the fiery pursuer, and stopping now and then to watch the fire with slavering jaws. He is ready to fight but that impalpable thing that comes with hot breath, has no substance for him to crush within his deadly paws."

"I feel sorry fer them thar deer," said One-Eye. "They is so purty, and they's so timid, and they look so appealin' at one, as they rush hither and thither like a lot of frightened sheep that I am allus a-wantin' ter go and help 'em git free."

"Snake! Heap big, snake."

Kittigazuit pointed to a venomous reptile that wriggled onward, like a ghost-snake, leaving an uneven wiggling mark in the dust of the road.

"There isn't a denizen of this vast forest that isn't running in terrible panic from the King of the Fire-World," shouted John. "Nothing is so awful as a forest-fire."

"It ain't ther animuls thet are all in denger, John, jest now. We ain't safe, my boy, and we are in a fair way to be made cinders of, at thet."

John knew that One-Eye was correct.

But he did not wish to alarm Jane more than was necessary and had tried to act as if there was not great danger.

But Jane knew.

She had known of the deadly forest-fire long before the feet of John Fane had pressed the North-West sod.

She had also decided not to let John know that she was aware of the danger.

In the friendly feeling that had grown up between the young couple each was anxious to keep bad news away from the other.

Jane stood watching the mystery of the fire with a wrapt face in spite of the danger that surrounded her.

"Is it not awful this wild beating of the fiery element upon the defenceless woods," she said to Fane. "Look at the flame and smoke sweep up that tall tree? It is gone in a breath. Nothing now but a charred stump that no one would ever think had been a tree."

"The roar of the flames, the burr of the falling timber, the dreadful flashes of smoky flame-topped stifling vapor that comes to us here, is the most dreaded thing in my mind of this terrible danger we are facing."

"See our fires ketch holdt," shouted One-Eye. "Look! The flames are rushing toward the bigger flames. The back-draft of the big fire is a takin' ourn to it—my, we may be saved yet. I hate to die a broilin'."

"Enough for you to know that will be your fate, after death, eh?" cheerily cried John.

The situation now had slowly but surely changed.

The ruse of One-Eye had partly saved the party.

They were now in no great danger from a direct rush of the fire but they might be in danger any moment from the fire's jumping over the stage-road into the forest beyond and thus hemming them in on every side.

"We might escape through the forest that has not yet been touched by the fire," said Fane. "But we would be in fully as bad a plight if we took to the woods there—no, My God, we can not escape that way; the woods there are also full of flame!"

Jane shrieked.

The red glare of a great conflagration at that point showed the beleaguered party that the flames had reached their only possible refuge.

"Back-fire that er way," roared One-Eye. "Hustle hard er we'll git ketched agin."

The party with flying feet heaped up more dry leaves, bunch-grass and sticks and soon had several fires merrily blazing in the direction of the new danger.

But now the wind seemed to direct its energy toward blowing upon the devoted party.

The smoke became stifling. The great sparks that flew through the air seemed to dart at every one in the endangered zone; and the roar of the appalling spectacle dinned into all ears so that the scene about the unfortunates was like that of an inferno.

"Et's a gittin too hot fer me," mildly roared One-Eye, "thar's goin' ter be a cooked-stage-driver ef I don't git away from hyar soon."

"The coach! Why not try to rush back to the coach. We might dash through the flames if we had a coach. Let us try it."

Jane spoke these words in her frenzy.

"That's the idea," yelled Fane in reply. "One-Eye, Jane is right. Rush for the coach."

"Thar et is beyont us," shouted the old stage-coach driver.

"Charge!"

The sound of Fane's voice made a ghastly echo above all the din, the rushing roar of the tremendous fire.

With speed the endangered people hurried back to the coach.

It was a mercy that the horses had not bolted in the welter of terrible danger about them.

But they had not.

"Poor beasts," cried Jane. "Look at them whimpering and cowering down to the earth, with their affrighted eyes turning hither and thither. They were literally too scared to run away."

"We had all better get on top of the coach," shouted Fane. "There may be need for combined action on our part. It will not do to separate just now."

Fane led the way to the top of the coach.

Behind him hurried One-Eye.

Jane and Kittigazuit active as kittens clambered up after the two men.

One-Eyed Dell grasped the reins.

With one touch of his hand upon them the horses seemed to shiver themselves together.

They knew their master was in control once more and were ready at once to do his bidding.

"Whoop!"

One-Eye gave this ringing yell as he flung his great whip-lash over his head.

Then the lash descended with a long, snake-like motion.

"Whoop!"

Well the horses knew this yell.

It was the last call on every ounce of energy they possessed.

Only in times of the greatest danger did the horses hear their driver so shriek.

All four beasts forgot the forest of flame, the on-roar of the awful tempest of fiery death that engulfed them on every side.

Every horse jumped into activity at once.

It seemed to One-Eye that they would jump out of their harnesses in the plunge forward.

But instead they lifted the coach clear from the ground.

The party went flying into the tempest of smoke and flame ahead of them.

"Saved!" cried Jane.

"My God! What is that?"

His cry, was lost in a fearful crash.

"The wheels are off of the coach. Stop the horses!"

Jane yelled the words at One-Eye.

The stage-driver threw all his weight on the reins.

The horses could not drag the heavy, wheelless coach far.

They stopped.

The coach now lay on its side, with the left rear wheel many feet away from it.

The other wheels lay under the coach a wreck of wood and iron.

The axles of the coach were twisted and bent beyond repair by the speed with which the horses had dragged it along in the rocky road before One-Eye had checked them.

"We can not escape! We are hemmed in by the fire. Our coach has broken down."

In answer to these words of terror shouted by One-Eye, a howling burst of laughter came to their ears.

Jane looked in the direction of the sound.

Mounted on his huge black horse, his face wearing the mask in which he had first been seen by John Fane, perched high on a jutting rocky pinnacle above the fire but where he could plainly see the stress in which his victims were laboring, stood Black Pete, the outlaw chief.

"Haw! Haw! Haw! My plot wins. Die, John Fane, die, you cur dog, die!"

Black Pete, desperado, sent his bitter taunt down to his silent, and supposedly helpless victims.

The leaping flames, that seemed now to be about to obliterate the unhappy travellers, darted higher and higher, and threw a dazzling red glow over the triumphant form of the bandit.

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" Black Pete howled again. "My revenge is complete. So must die all those who dare to follow Black Pete, the outlaw, to his lair!"

CHAPTER XI.

"MY TRICK!" YELLED JOHN FANE.

"You lie, you black hound!"

John Fane's face was lightened by the hope of a great deed, when he heard Black Pete's words.

He shook his impotent fist at the guerrilla-leader. He knew that Pete was out of gun range, or his life would have paid instant forfeit for his deadly taunt.

"We will not die, yet!" added Fane, as he turned toward One-Eye.

Jane hurried toward the valiant young man.

The Eskimo also hurried to the natural leader.

"Cut the traces to the horses. Cut them loose from the coach," sneered John. "Then all mount and ride. There's four human beings here, four horses there—"

Fane had time to say no more.

"Be Gosh," cried One-Eye, "of all the darned chumps, that ever hit the North-West, I'm the one. This yar tenderfoot has got us all locoed when it comes ter plannin' how ter git out o' trouble."

"I no ride," cried Kittigazuit.

"You ride or fry, ye has yar choice," replied One-Eye. "Fer me it's a case o' ride. I don't like a fried stage-coach driver. It's an uncommon dish I know, but seein' as I've gotter be the dish, et's a case er ride fer me, an' I ain't been astrid o' a hoss in thirty year."

But while One-Eye talked his agile fingers had been as busy as his tongue.

He soon stripped the covering harnesses off each of the four horses, leaving only their bridles.

"Here, Jane. I'll help you up," cried Fane.

In a moment the girl was safely astride the beast, in spite of her short-skirt.

"I'll take my skirt along this time," she smiled down at John, with a slight blush. "There will be no sheltering stage-coach for me to enter, if I live through this road that skirts fiery death, where I can change my habit."

"Oh, you women," answered John, "in death's clutches you still think of your looks."

"It is all we have to attract you wonderful men," Jane added with a pout.

One-Eye had tried to help Kittigazuit on the horse which she had selected, meanwhile, but the result was not the greatest success in the world.

When One-Eye hoisted the Eskimo up one side of the dancing beast, she promptly slid over the animal's back, and landed with the greatest astonishment on the other side.

Then One-Eye in his excitement would run around the animal and hoist Kittigazuit up again, and she would reverse the sliding and land with a resounding "ugh" on the side of the horse from which she had originally started.

Fane and Jane had been watching this comedy for some time.

One-Eye whose face was red from exertion and whose single eye was red and inflamed with anger, began swearing in a lusty tone.

"Do it over again," cried Fane, "it's a new kind of game. I never saw the like of it before."

Jane was almost falling off her horse with laughter.

"I hope never to see the like of it again."

The bewilderment on Kittigazuit's face; the anger on the stage-driver's countenance sent both John and Jane into further shrieks of laughter.

"This darned Indian is wuss then an eel," shouted One-Eye. "Oh, you two young lovers would laugh ef ye was a-burnin'—and if ye don't help me ter git this gal up and strapped to the mast-head of this yar hoss, ye will soon be a burnin' up, see?"

This fact was brought sharply home to the couple

whose laughter acted on One-Eye as a red rag to a bull.

"Stick her on somehow," cried John. "We have no time to lose."

"Wisht I had some mucilage," cried One-Eye.

A happy thought seemed to strike One-Eye.

He pulled a couple of reins from the harness that lay in the road.

He then lashed Kittigazuit to the horse.

"I oncet over to Nome, seed a show-gal a lashed jest like thet," One-Eye explained. "Her name was Mazeppa, en I thought then it was a purty queer name fer a gal, an' I jest thinks of that thar act, when I was a strugglin' with that blubber-eatin' Eski-moo. An'—well ye see the result."

"I see. Highly original young lady. I mean Mazeppa. Also this Eskimo who resembles most of the Mazeppa's I've seen more through contrast than resemblance," replied John. "But we must now mount and ride for our lives."

"Jane bein' ready this thar Eski-moo bein' lashed to her hoss, it remains fer jest you an' me ter get aboard our crafts an' set sail."

John answered by leaping upon his horse.

One-Eye vaulted upon his.

They whirled the animals head on at the flames; One-Eye having taken the precaution of blindfolding the animals with cloth torn from his jacket.

The horses would thus not fear the fiery danger the party must meet.

"Ride for your lives, all," cried Fane.

He dug his heels into the horse he rode.

The animal darted down the road.

Behind Fane thundered Jane's steed.

Kittigazuit, like a monkey in a circus ring on the donkey's back, hung on to her horse with fear in her eyes; but she happily could not tumble off owing to the reins that confined her to the animal's back.

The way for the first hundred feet was like a progress through a furnace.

Jane never could understand how she kept her horse under her, or how she breathed at all, through the choking, fire-swept atmosphere.

She knew that her eyes were glued to Fane's broad back.

She knew she followed welcome refuge as a sailor steers for a safe-harbor.

Through the terrible rain of the fire-brands, through the whirling rush of the awful conflagration, Jane seemed only to live to follow the rushing form ahead of her.

The thundering hoofs of the horses came faintly to her ears. She saw the red glare of the burning woods slipping behind her.

"I am stifling," Jane thought. "I am dying."

Her head reeled. Her eyes seemed to burn and shrivel in her head. Her tongue was a shapeless cinder in her parched mouth.

"I can not live longer," Jane thought. "My horse is slackening his pace. He too is dying. All is lost."

Jane's senses left her.

She fell forward headlong from her animal.

The next thing the girl knew was the finding of herself propped up in John Fane's arms, while Kittigazuit was sprinkling water in her face and One-Eye his face expressing extreme solicitude was leaning over her bathing her brow in whiskey.

The bathos of the situation struck Jane.

She sat up and went into a gale of hysterical laughter.

"You men are so fun fun-funny," Jane cried. "And the waste of good whiskey has been so marked—oh, One-Eye, I shall certainly die this time."

One-Eye looked at the girl. Then he looked at the whiskey.

He gravely winked at the girl and swallowed an enormous drink of the whiskey.

"I ain't no saw-bones o' a doctor," One-Eye remarked to Fane, "but I jest guess this gal will live."

"Of course she will," cried John warmly. "The idea of hinting at her death."

One-Eye winked again at Kittigazuit, who acknowledged the compliment with a wide grin, and took another drink.

"How did it all happen?" cried Jane. "Here we are in peace, outside the fire zone, which I can see from here, and we are all alive? How did it happen?"

"There wasn't much to happen in that dash for life," replied John, who was now rubbing the burned hairs from his horse. "We rushed along through fire and smoke until we passed the danger—that was all."

"How far did we come?"

"About two miles."

"When did I fall?"

"Just after we were out of danger."

"Wasn't that just like a woman?"

"Well you stood the danger to your limit. When you tumbled off of your horse you had passed the danger. Anyway you stuck to the game as long as was necessary to save your life."

"How consoling you are? But after all a woman can go only about so far. That is why we aren't lordly, like you men. Our capacity only goes so far—about as far as our nerves let them go."

Fane smiled.

"That was a narrow squeak."

One-Eye came running up at this time.

"By thunder!" he cried, "in this yar self-preservin' game I clean fergits one thing that I'm sorry fer it'll make trouble fer ye."

"What is that?"

"I fergits the treasure box on that thar coach. Say, there's enough money in that thar box ter let the biggest bank president in the North-West turn green with envy. An now it's all burned ter a cinder."

Fane laughed in a care-free manner.

"All right, hev' yar laugh. Seein' as ye was the guard on this hyar coach, and I am only its driver, why, ye cunnerstan' I can't see jest whar yer laugh comes in. It's your funeral, not mine. But how are ye goin' to explain the loss of the money, boy, ter the Hudson's Bay Company wot owns the cash?"

"Say, One-Eye, look here," replied Fane, "I am a tenderfoot but no tenderfool."

"Meanin'?"

"I cached that treasure box, ten feet deep, in a great hole in the solid rock, stamped the hole down with clay and rock, and then rolled another big rock in front of the hole, long ago. In fact this was done before the fire was started."

"Hurrah! Darn me ef these yar tenderfoots aint better than we old-timers out hyar. Boy, poddner—put it thar."

Again the two men shook hands lustily.

"Are ye sure ye can find the gold when this fire is

out? The landmarks er liable ter be changed then by this hyar fire?"

"You bet! I could go to the place if an earthquake had been there ahead of me."

"Say, yar sartin the best in the business—"

"Let up! The only thing I'm afraid of now is that the outlaws will kill us all and the secret of the hidden treasure will be lost forever."

"Wall, hev' ye told every one in this yar party about whar the treasure is hid?"

"No."

"Better do it then. Whichever on us gits to La Pierre House arter this kin tell the Hudson's Bay Company agent thar whar the gold is cached. Then we are sure thet the gold will git back to them thet owns it. Fer I feel purty sure some one will git by this trouble. We all may not, but some one on us will git by."

"That's a good idea."

Accordingly Fane told the party of the secret of the cached treasure box.

"It is right underneath the corpse of the dead man we found along side of the road," cried John. "You can not miss the place because even if all the trees at that spot are burned, the great rock where the dead man rests towers up at least five hundred feet above the road."

"I know thet thar spot, why I've passed it every trip over this route every summer fer the past twenty-five years, moren less," cried One-Eye.

"I could go to the place any time," Jane declared.

"Me too," grunted Kittigazuit.

"Then we all have the secret in our innermost hearts. Whoever gets alive to La Pierre House must tell the Hudson's Bay Company Postmaster there, where the treasure is."

"They ain't er goin' ter be no productive hold up er my coach, this trip by them thar bandits," yelled One-Eye.

"My trick!" yelled John Fane.

"Don't you be so sure there," interrupted a thundering voice. "Kill the Constable but save the women for us. Don't injure them!"

It was Black Pete's voice.

He tore down upon Fane and his party, his face still obscured by his mask.

With him rode Nort Bonair and the other *Masked Riders of his demon gang*.

They made a flying-wedge of horrible, shouting, masked horsemen.

"Fire!" yelled Black Pete with a great howl of rage.

CHAPTER XII.

A RACE FOR A SHOT.

Shots came flying at the head of John Fane.

His escape from being riddled by bullets was a miraculous one.

By all the odds of Dame Fate, at the first fire John Fane ought to have plunged backward, a dead man, torn to pieces by the hail of shots that were sent at him by the entire outlaw gang.

But the bandits were riding so swiftly. They were in such a concentrated position, that they had not a single chance to take good aim when they trained their weapons on Fane.

He, when he heard Black Pete's yell of rage had pulled Jane backward to the ground, and he had fallen close to her side.

So the bullets idly cut the air, and did not touch Fane or his pretty companion.

One-Eye had also with true woodsman skill crouched to the ground.

He did not have to draw Kittigazuit to the ground.

"She beat the party to it by at least four foot," cried One-Eye in describing the attack later.

From the ground, Fane took aim at Black Pete.

Flash! Whang!

With the sharp report of his revolver Black Pete clapped his hand to his arm.

"I'm hit," he cried to Nort Bonair.

"Badly hurt?" queried Bonair.

"Noaw, only through me arm."

"Gee, but those people fight, now, don't they?"

"They sure do."

"Better draw off the gang and repair damages."

"Guess we had."

Accordingly while Bonair attended to the falling back of the bandits, Black Pete bound up his injured arm.

One-Eye gave a great yell of pleasure when he saw the bandits turn as one man in full retreat.

"Hurrah!" he cried, "We've licked 'em."

"Don't be too sure," replied Fane. "They will come back again soon."

But while the bandits were repairing damages Fane did not propose to be held up like a rat in a trap, as he knew he would be, if he and his party did not escape before the attack was renewed.

"Mount horses," he commanded, "we must try to escape while we can."

The entire tiny cavalcade started as quickly as possible in their weary condition, toward La Pierre House.

"I'm dead sorry ter leave that thar coach thar," cried One-Eye.

"There isn't much of that coach left," dryly put in Fane. "The flames have undoubtedly licked it up long ere this."

"Oh dear, my trunk, with all my pretty things in it," sighed Jane.

"I lose bundle," remarked Kittigazuit.

"I wisht I had that thar gun I give ye, Jane, when I seen them bandits comin' that thar time."

Jane held up the weapon.

"Hurrah!" cried One-Eye. "Thet's good luck! We kin git the best o' them bandits now, ye bet yer boots. That thar weepin is a corker."

Fane saw a chance to score a point.

"Yes," he rejoined, "it's best to have a man have charge of a man's weapon."

"Especially if you curl up with a bullet along your head which puts you out of commission and leave a woman to clamber up the side of a dizzy coach, dashing along at about a million miles an hour," put in Jane, speaking apparently to the woods by which the party were rapidly passing.

One-Eye flushed.

He grinned at last.

"Say, that was a good one on me, now wasnt it?"

he stuttered. "You seen me grab your gun, insist on trading with ye fer yar weepin, and then wen that thar scrap begun I gets mine in me coconut, on the go in, and leaves ye ter to the best stunt er your life. Say, Jane, ye'd make a mighty heart-smashin' boy."

It was now Jane's turn to turn red.

"Say," remarked Fane, to cover Jane's embarrassment, "you, any way, got there when you came back to life. Your little episode with Mazeppa Kittigazuit, here, was a poem in every-day life."

One-Eyed grinned in appreciation of this remark.

"Say, boy," he said, "fer a tender-foot yer holdin' yer own, an' I must say ye has a fine spirit o' re-par-tee about ye."

The horses meanwhile had been making good time.

For a few miles, as nothing was heard of the outlaws further, Fane urged the animals to their best paces.

Then feeling that it might be well not to take all the speed out of the animals by fast work, Fane slowed down to a good slinging trot, and at length, the party had progressed about five miles from the scene of their narrow escape.

One-Eye, knowing the trail-road, had led the way.

At a spot where the road wound close to the sides of a mountain, One-Eye stopped.

"Look thar," he said.

"What do you see?"

"Thar's the mystery o' this region. Thar's thet smoke agin' thet we all knows when we see it, and don' often see it, when we want ter."

Fane's eyes saw a few hundred feet away a trail leading down to the valley, and which seemed to run directly toward the phantom smoke.

"Do you know anything about that trail?" he asked One-Eye.

"I never noticed it before," replied One-Eye.

Fane sat watching the trail intently for a moment.

He swung his horse ahead.

He guided the animal down the steep trail toward the valley.

"Gosh," cried One-Eye "ef he ain a-goin' down inter thet valley. Well, here I go also."

"And here I go," added Jane.

"Ugh!" cried the Eskimo as she followed on behind.

The trail to everybody's surprise was not a hard one to negotiate.

It wound around the hard places, ducked by the rocks, made easy going on level places, and in a surprisingly short time the party found itself pushing its way toward the smoke which now, like a gigantic flame-tipped pall, was apparently only a few hundred feet overhead.

"We are going to get to the bottom of the mystery of grizzly gulch in a few moments," shouted Fane, now sure that he was about to penetrate the dread secret, although he knew that many had tried to do so and had perished in the attempt.

"There not fifty feet over our heads a little south of where we are is the smoke," shouted Jane.

"I see it now plainly. We will soon be at the seat of the mystery," cried Fane.

"Look thar," yelled One-Eye.

When he spoke all eyes were strained up in the air.

There was no trace of the smoke to be seen.

"Why what, say!" stammered Fane.

"The smoke has disappeared," whispered Jane in an awe-struck tone.

It was indeed true.

From where the party stood not a single trace could be seen of the fitfully soaring vapor.

Fane gave a cry of alarm.

"Let us retrace our steps to the point where the smoke was first seen by us after we reached this valley," he insisted.

It was a short ride backward to this spot.

The party covered the distance quickly.

"My God! Oh, look there! There's the smoke again."

One-Eye said the words in a trembling tone.

His pointing finger covered the ghostly vapor once more.

There was the whirling phantom smoke again, idly waving its great arm upward toward the deep blue of the sky.

Fane rubbed his eyes.

"By thunder!" he cried. "What do you suppose it all means?"

Jane was equally thunderstruck.

"It is surely smoke," she said. "See how it drifts back and forth under each passing breeze that catches it. Look!"

The party gazed half-panic stricken.

"Let us go back to the point where the vapor disappears," suggested Fane.

Once more the same condition obtained.

The smoke could no longer be seen.

"I tell ye boy," the solemn voice of One-Eye said, "thar's many a man thet has tried ter find that thar smoke and not one hez ever done it. I don't know what makes it but it's dead sure thet no livin' man has ever got ter the bottom of that thar mystery. The *mystery of grizzly gulch* will never be solved by mortal man."

But Fane would not give up.

Again and again he raced back and forth over the trail from the point where the smoke could be seen plainly to the point where it suddenly disappeared.

He then made a great circle and rushed around from left to right, narrowing the circle's circumference at each outward swing, but the mystery was as deep as ever.

"I give up," at last said Fane, his face drawn with the exertion through which he had passed. "I see that so far as I am concerned that I can not fathom this mystery."

"Boy," cried One-Eye. "I knew from the beginnin' thet ye could not."

"What is that?" cried Jane as she pointed toward a band of horsemen that came loping around a jutting pile of rock far over to the right of their position.

Fane groaned.

"Out upon them," he said, "Here come the *Masked Riders* again!"

"Get what ready?" moaned One-Eye. "Boy, we aint got enough ammernition ter fire ten shots."

Fane's face blanched.

"What?"

"It's sq."

"How did it happen?"

"I ferget all about ther cattridges," moaned One-Eye.

"Where were they?" cried Jane.

"In the coach," weakly answered One-Eye.

"And the coach has been burned in the forest fire,"

"Yes."

Jane's face went white.

"This is the end, isn't it?" she dully asked of Fane.

"Yes."

Kittigazuit burst into a howl of fear.

"Stop!" sharply commanded Fane.

The Eskimo stilled her frightened plaints.

One-Eye stood apart his face calm.

"Wall, boy, didn't I tell ye it was a game fer a fitin' man the one ye was a takin' up?"

"You did, and you were right."

"Wall, so fer as I'm consarned I'm gettin' ter be an' old man and ez I've gotter die some time it don't make much odds, fer I've had an er-ven-ter-ful life o' good old times an' now that the cashing in time hez come I ain't er goin' ter kick about ut but I'll take my medicine like a man. But ye two youngsters with the world afore ye, I'm dead sorry fer. I didn't ought ter let ye, boy, git in this yar hole, but young blood is headstrong, and ye had ter git yer belly full o' it."

"Nonsense! I didn't come here or get into this muss because I liked it, One-Eye, but just because it was my duty."

"Duty is all right, me boy, but a skin full of outlaw bullets is darned poor satisfaction fer a duty that didn't git over."

Jane was crying softly.

"Well," she said, "I didn't come out to this country to die. But if I must, I suppose I ought to be proud of the company I am going to die in."

Fane could not help smiling.

But he turned sharply toward One-Eye.

"Let us close in a circle," he added, "and then when the shock comes we will shoot as long as we can. Then grasp our Bowie knives and die hard and uncomplainingly as a man should."

The thunder of the hoofs of the outlaws' horses now could be plainly heard.

"Why, what is this?" said Jane, "they aren't coming this way. Yet they must see us—why, what is the matter; what are the outlaws doing?"

The *masked riders* could be seen rushing over the plain.

"There's a fight going on," put in Fane, "are the bandits fighting among themselves? Has a mutiny broken out in the camp?"

"They sure are a fitin' and they's a fitin' hard," snapped One-Eye. "See thet horse go down. Gosh! Did ye see thet fellow get that bullet right through his head?"

"And look," added Jane, "there goes the outlaw they call Nort Bonair."

The scene was an exciting one.

The neighing of maddened horses came fitfully to the watchers.

Flashes of revolvers could be plainly seen.

The dreaded roar of the weapons came across the

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DOOM OF THE SMOKE TRAIL.

John Fane strained his eyes at the band of horsemen.

"Get ready for our last fight," he shuddered.

mile of acrid land between the awe-struck travelers and the fighting party of outlaws.

Men fell now almost in files.

The popping of revolvers grew into a steady roar. The scene was one of a great battle and Jane covered her eyes with her hands to shut out the terrible sight.

The battle drifted toward the party.

Now the outlaws were not five hundred feet away.

All saw Black Pete, with his face still masked, fighting like an incarnate fiend in the midst of a knot of rushing, blood-stained men.

"Black Pete, is the center of the attack, now," pointed out Fane.

He had hardly spoken when the outlaw rushed by several of his foes.

He ran directly away from the watchers at the utmost speed of his fine black horse.

Behind him trailed a fighting legion of men.

"Hold hard thar!" bellowed Pete, drawing a bead on the nearest pursuer.

"Kill him, boys, we have got him in a hole," replied a shrill voice, in answer to the thunderous roar of the leader of the outlaws.

The fighters then swung away toward the long trailing, mysterious smoke that again could be seen, now making a tremendous spiral mark upon the sun-lighted sky.

Into the haze, into the depths of the smoke the fighters disappeared.

The heavens then seemed to be torn asunder by a horrible, grinding crash.

The earth rocked under the feet of the awed watchers.

Their horses turned and fled as if pursued by a thousand devils.

When the mad panic the animals had been flung into, had been stilled and Fane once again turned their heads toward the point where he had seen the fighting outlaws disappear, he saw a wonderful sight.

The entire sky was red, blood red in color and through the red there could be seen a dancing film of trailing smoke.

For ten minutes the party gazed spell-bound.

Then the wide heavens seemed to crack apart.

There was a wonderful burst of purple light, a blinding flash again, a dull roar and then a great silence.

"Ah, look thar!" whispered One-Eye.

Again far above their heads, lazily, drifted the spectral smoke.

And never in this world was ever heard or seen the slightest trace of the dreaded band of outlaws, headed by Black Pete.

The fate of the Masked Riders lay within the impenetrable veil that shields, forever, the Mystery of Grizzly Gulch.

CONCLUSION.

Fane spell-bound watched until his eyes were balls of fire the dreadful spot that tried his soul when he attempted to get behind the mystery.

Jane sat by his side white and mute.

One-Eye, his single orb darting hither and thither in the vain hope of learning more of the secret, was speechless.

Kittigazuit was a mere wreck of tired nerves, and sobbed and cried in her dread frenzy.

Nothing of horror rewarded the party.

No sound came from the darkening spot.

Sadly they retraced their steps up the long trail to the stage-road.

When they had reached the road and were again standing by the side of the rock beneath which lay buried the body of the unknown man, Fane and One-Eye searched for the buried treasure box of the coach.

It was readily found.

The box was hoisted to one of the horses and was firmly bound there by One-Eye.

They tore parts of their clothing into strips and thus managed to bind the box firmly in place.

"Well," said Fane. "There is one more duty to perform."

He searched until he found a square white stone.

Then with infinite pains Fane began cutting deep into the solid stone.

These were the words he engraved:

"An Unknown White-man lies buried here. Killed by Black Pete's outlaw gang. Stranger, step lightly."

"Is there any hope of discovering the name of the man?" queried Jane of Fane.

"I know of none," he replied.

"Do you suppose he was a member of Black Pete's gang?"

"I think not."

"Whom do you suppose he was?"

"One o' them hundred men that hev tried to fathom that thar mystery an' died fer his pains," said One-Eye in his deep voice.

"Are you going to attempt to get further into the mystery?" asked Jane as she turned toward Fane.

"I fear it is useless," he answered. "It is evident that in some way, I do not pretend to know, Black Pete and his men became involved in a terrible fight."

"The gang seemed to be trying to kill Pete."

"From what we saw of the battle I should think so."

"Pete then tried to escape?"

"Yes."

"And then they must have gotten into the realm of the spectral smoke that we saw hovering over Grizzly Gulch."

"Yes."

"But how did they disappear?"

"Oh, I can not fathom that. I simply know that they did disappear."

"Say boy, ye hadn't better try ter say no more," cried One-Eye, "Let us hurry on to La Pierre House. We are ten miles easily from thet place. We can chaw the rag over on our way back."

"Good advice," cried Jane.

"Forward," ordered Fane.

The entire party obeyed with alacrity.

When they reached the pinnacle of the mountain which would give them their last sight of Grizzly Gulch, and dread valley that led to it, they saw, still soaring fitfully over their heads in the grim distance, a column of nodding, dancing, flame-shot smoke.

They left the vapor to the silence of the mysterious North-West.

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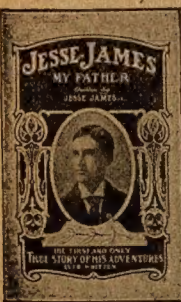
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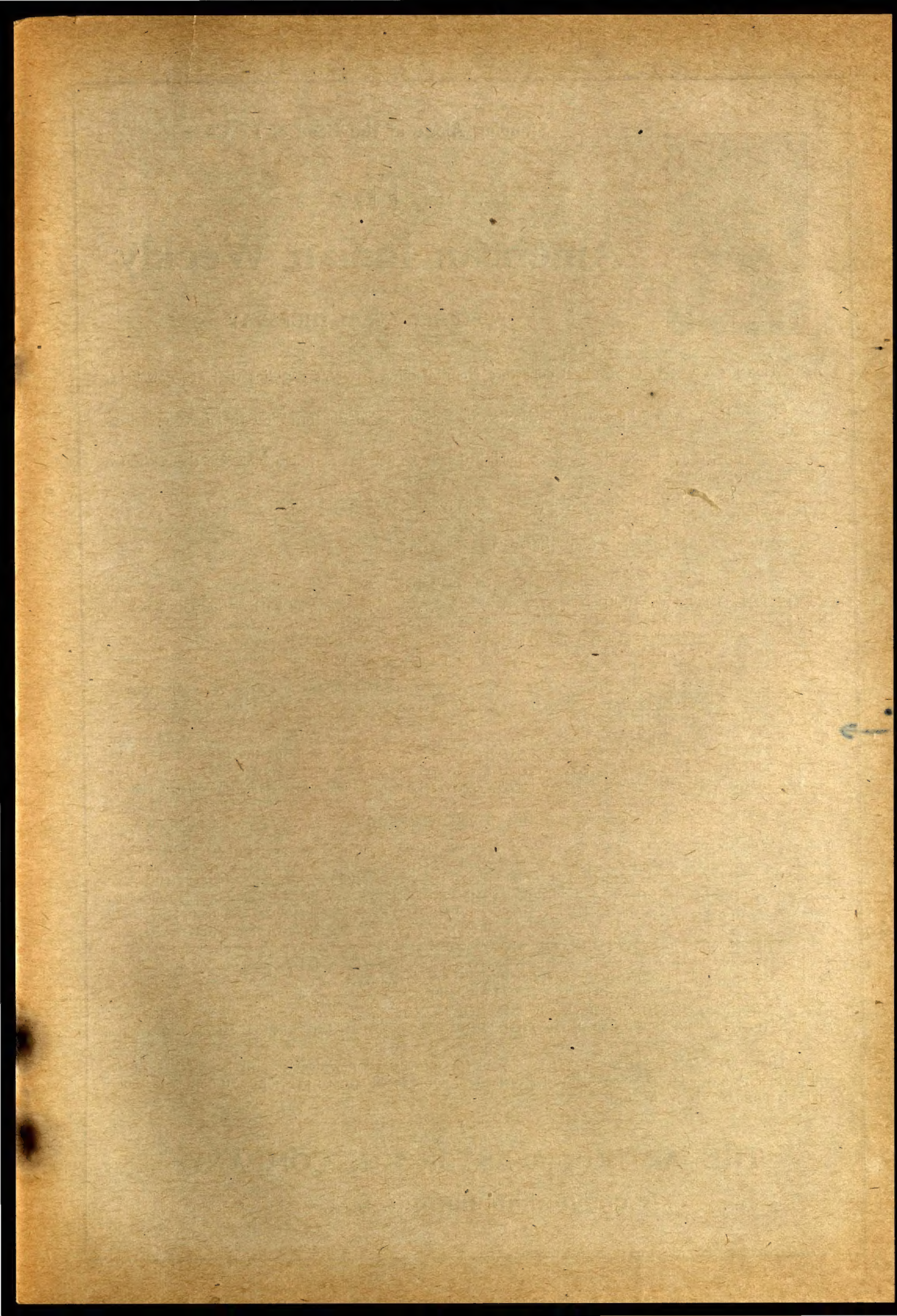
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3. The Secret of the Haunted House; or The Great Detective's Tragic Find.
4. The King of all Detectives; or Young Jack Sleuth on the Trail.
5. The Giant Detective's Last Shadow; A Tale of Herculean Detective Adventure.
6. The Silent Terror; A Narrative of Genuine Detective Strategy.
7. The Veiled Beauty; or The Mystery of the California Heiress.
8. The Mystery of the Spaniard's Vendetta; or A Great Detective's Marvelous Strategy.
9. The Great Bond Robbery; or Tracked by a Female Detective.
10. Old Sleuth's Greatest Case; or Caught by the King of all Detectives.
11. The Bay Ridge Mystery; or Old Sleuth's Winning Hand.
12. Shadowed to his Doom; or Foiled by the Yankee Detective.
13. Trapping the Counterfeiters; or The Lightning Detective on the Trail.
14. Trailed by the Wall Street Detective; or Badger's Midnight Quest.
15. The Irish Detective's Greatest Case; or The Strategy of O'Neil McDarragh.
16. The Greatest Mystery of the Age; or Saved by the Gipsy Detective.
17. Trapping the Moonshiners; or Strange Adventures of a Government Detective in the Tennessee Mountains.
18. The Giant Detective Among the Cowboys; or The Weird Narrative of a Lost Man.
19. The Mystery of the Black Trunk; or Manfred's Strange Quest.
20. The Chief of the Counterfeiters; or The Boy Detective's Greatest Haul.
21. The Mystery of the Floating Head; or Caught by the King of the Detectives.
22. The Beautiful Criminal; or The New York Detective's Strangest Case.
23. The Great Train Robbery; or Saved by a Woman Detective.
24. The Italian Adventure; A Tale of Marvelous Plots.
25. Red-Light Will, The River Detective; or The Round-Up of the Wharf Rat's Gang.
26. The Twin Shadows; or A Surprising Case of Mistaken Identity.
27. The Smugglers of New York Bay; or The River Pirates' Greatest Crime.
28. Black Raven, the Terror of the Georgia Moonshiners; or The Mountaineers' Last Stand.
29. Unmasking a Villain; or The French Detective's Greatest Case.
30. Snared by a Russian Duke; or An American Detective Among the Nihilists.
31. The Mystery of the Black Pool; or The Dutch Detective's Sensational Find.
32. The Veiled Lady of the Ruins; or Hamud's Ghastly Discovery.
33. Foiled by a Corpse; or A Tale of the Great Southwest.
34. Night Hawk, the Mounted Detective; or Trailing the Mountain Outlaws.
35. Kidnapped in New York; or The Dangers of a Great City.
36. Lured by a Siren; or In the Clutches of a Beautiful Blackmailer.
37. Old Sleuth's Triumph; or The Great Bronx Mystery.
38. A Trail of Blood; Being the sequel to "Old Sleuth's Triumph."
39. The Band of the "Red Oath;" or Run to Cover by a Government Spy.
40. Tempted by a Woman; or The French Detective's Narrow Escape.
41. The Million Dollar Conspiracy; or Old Sleuth to the Rescue.
42. Accused from the Coffin; or The Frustration of a Dastardly Plot.
43. Coolness Against Cunning; or Trailed by "Faithful Mike."
44. Foiled by Love; or The "Molly Maguires'" Last Stand.
45. Under a Million Disguises; or Manfred the Metamorphosist.
46. Tracked by the Man of Mystery; or Manfred's Great Triumph, being a sequel to Under a Million Disguises.
47. The Human Blood-Hound; or The Bowery Detective on the Trail.
48. Manfred's Strangest Case; or Foiled by the Weird Detective.
49. Monte-Cristo Ben, the Ever Ready Detective; A Narrative of Remarkable Complications.
50. Old Terrible, the Iron Arm Detective; or The Mystery of The Beautiful Heiress.
51. The Stain of Guilt; or "Old Puritan" to the Rescue.
52. A Conspiracy of Crime; or Foiling the Kidnappers.
53. "Old Ironsides" in France; or Trailed by the Giant Detective.
54. The Beautiful Mystery of Paris; being the sequel to "Old Ironsides" in France.
55. The Gypsy Detective on the Trail; or Solving a Great Crime.
56. The Half-Breed's Secret; A Narrative of Phenomenal Adventures.
57. The Italian's Revenge; A Thrilling Narrative of Adventures.
58. A Three-Fold Mystery; A Straight Out Detective Narrative.
59. The Midnight League; or The Giant Detective in Ireland.
60. The Secret of the Dungeon; being the sequel to "The Midnight League."
61. Gypsy Frank, the Long Trail Detective; or Solving a Great Mystery.
62. The Weird Detective; or "Old Baldy" on the Trail.
63. A Terrible Mystery; A Narrative of Peculiar Detective Tricks and Devices.
64. The Strangest Mystery in the World; or Harry Brand's Winning Play.
65. The Old Miser's Secret; A Strange Detective Case.
66. The Old Miser's Secret; A Strange Detective Case.
67. The Man of Mystery; or Mephisto the Detective.
68. The Mysterious Detective; or Solving a Great Case.
69. The American Monte-Cristo; A Strange and Marvelous Narrative.
70. On Their Track; being the continuation of "The American Monte-Cristo."
71. The Omnipresent Avenger; being the continuation of "On Their Track."
72. Tragedy and Strategy; being the conclusion of "The Omnipresent Avenger."
73. The Gypsy Detective's Greatest Case; or Phil Tremaine to the Rescue.
74. The Shadows of New York; or The American Monte-Cristo's Winning Hand.
75. The Old Magician's Weird Legacy; A Tale of Marvelous Happenings in India.
76. A Mysterious Disappearance; A Singularly Strange Narrative.
77. The Red Detective; A Great Tale of Mystery.
78. The Weird Warnings of Fate; or Ebeon's Strange Case.
79. The Treasure of the Rockies; A Tale of Strange Adventures.
80. Bonanza Bardie's Winning Strike; being the sequel to "The Treasure of the Rockies."
81. Long Shadow, the Detective; A Tale of Indian Strategy.
82. The Magic Disguise Detective; The Weird Adventures of a "Transform."
83. A Young Detective's Great Shadow; A Narrative of Extraordinary Detective Devices.
84. Stealthy Brock, the Detective; or Trailed to their Doom.
85. Old Sleuth to the Rescue; A Startling Narrative of Hidden Treasure.
86. Old Sleuth, the Avenger; being the sequel to "Old Sleuth to the Rescue."
87. The Great Jewel Mystery; or The Right Man in the Case.
88. Jackson Cooper, the Wizard Detective; A Narrative of Wonderful Detective Skill.
89. Foiling the Conspirators; or Daring Tom Carey to the Rescue.
90. The Banker's Crime; or The Weird Adventures of "Phenomenal Joe."
91. Gasparoni, the Italian Detective; A Strange Weird Tale of City Life.
92. The Vengeance of Fate; being the sequel to "Gasparoni, the Italian Detective."
93. The Secret Special Detective; or "Old Transform" on the Trail.
94. The Shadow of a Crime; or the "Iron Duke's" Strange Case.
95. The Secret of the Kidnapped Heir; A Strange Detective Narrative.
96. Foiled by a Female Detective; being the sequel to "The Kidnapped Heir."
97. "Old Ironsides" in New York; or The Daughter of the G. A. R.
98. The Irish Detective; or Fergus Connor's Greatest Case.
99. The Shadow Detective; or The Mysteries of a Night.
100. Detective Thrash, the Man-Trapper; A Story of Extraordinary Detective Devices.
101. "Old Ironsides" at His Best; A Marvelous Detective Narrative.
102. Trailed by an Assassin; A Tale of Italian Vengeance.
103. The Lust of Hate; being the sequel to "Trailed by an Assassin."
104. A Golden Curse; or The Harvest of Sin.
105. The Hotel Tragedy; or Manfred's Greatest Detective Adventure.
106. The Mystery of Room 207; being the sequel to The Hotel Tragedy.
107. Gardemore, the Detective; or the King of the "Shadows."
108. The Fatal Chair; being the sequel to Gardemore, the Detective.
109. The Mask of Mystery; or The Graveyard Murder.
110. The Twisted Trail; being the sequel to the Mask of Mystery.
111. Booth Bell; or The Prince of Detectives Among the Indians.
112. The Beautiful Captive; being the continuation of Booth Bell.
113. Booth Bell's Twisted Trail; being the sequel to The Beautiful Captive.
114. The Wall Street Detective; or Harry Weir, the Lightning Trailer.
115. The Banker's Secret; being the sequel to The Wall Street Detective.
116. The Wizard's Trail; or The Mystery of a Lost Casket.
117. The House of Mystery; being the sequel to The Wizard's Trail.
118. Old Sleuth in New York; or Trailing a Great Criminal.
119. Manfred, the Ventriloquist Detective; or Wonderful Midnight "Shadows" in New York.
120. Wild Madge; or The Female Government Detective.
121. Old Electricity in New York; or Wayne Winthrop's Trail of a "Dead Secret."
122. Gamal the Hunchback; or The Adventures of a Ventriloquist.
123. Seth Bond, Detective; or the Mystery of an Old Mansion.
124. Galloway, the Detective; or Running the Crooks to Earth.
125. Old Sleuth's Quest; or A Fair Daughter's Fate.
126. Presto Quick; or The Weird Magician Detective.
127. Old Ironsides Long Trail; or The Giant Detective Out West.
128. Forging the Links; being the sequel to Old Ironsides Long Trail.
129. Queen Myra; or A Woman's Great Game of Hide and Seek.
130. The Duke of New York; or The Adventures of a Billionaire.
131. Prowler Tom, the Detective; or The Floating Beauty Mystery.
132. Man Against Man; being the sequel to Prowler Tom.
133. Old Sleuth's Silent Witness; or The Dead Hand at the Morgue.
134. The League of Four; or The Trail of the Man Tracker.
135. The House of Fear; or The Young Duke's Strange Quest.

TO BE PUBLISHED ON FRIDAY,

- Feb. 3-136. Foiled by Fate; being the sequel to The House of Fear.
Feb. 10-137. A Dash for Millions; or Old Ironsides Trail of Mystery.
Feb. 17-138. The Trail of Three; or The Motor Pirates' Last Stand.
Feb. 24-139. A Dead Man's Hand; or Caught by his Own Victim.

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- No. 1. THE OUTLAW'S PLEDGEor The Raid on the Old Stockade
No. 2. TRACKED TO HIS LAIRor The Pursuit of the Midnight Raider
No. 3. THE BLACK DEATHor The Curse of the Navajo Witch
No. 4. THE SQUAW MAN'S REVENGEor Kidnapped by the Piutes
No. 5. TRAPPED BY THE CREESor Tricked by a Renegade Scout
No. 6. BETRAYED BY A MOCCASINor The Round-Up of the Indian Smugglers
No. 7. FLYING CLOUD'S LAST STANDor The Battle of Dead Man's Canyon
No. 8. A DASH FOR LIFEor Tricked by Timber Wolves
No. 9. THE DECOY MESSAGEor The Ruse of the Border Jumpers
No. 10. THE MIDNIGHT ALARMor The Raid on the Paymaster's Camp
No. 11. THE MASKED RIDERSor The Mystery of Grizzly Gulch
No. 12. LURED BY OUTLAWSor The Mounted Ranger's Desperate Ride

TO BE PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY

- February 23—No. 13. STAGE COACH BILL'S LAST RIDE.....or The Bandits of Great Bear Lake
March 2—No. 14. THE TRAGEDY OF HANGMAN'S GULCH.....or The Ghost of Horn Mountains
March 9—No. 15. THE TREASURES OF MacKENZIE ISLES.....or The Outlaw's Drag-Net
March 16—No. 16. HELD UP AT SNAKE BASIN.....or The Renegade's Death-Vote
March 23—No. 17. THE MAIL RIDER'S DASH WITH DEATH.....or The Desperado of Poker Flat
March 30—No. 18. THE RED MASSACRE.....or The Hold-Up Men of Barren Lands
April 6—No. 19. THE MYSTERY OF THE ARCTIC CIRCLE.....or The Robbers' Round-Up
April 13—No. 20. HOUNDED BY RED MEN.....or The Road Agents of Porcupine River
April 20—No. 21. THE FUR TRADER'S DISCOVERY.....or The Brotherhood of Thieves
April 27—No. 22. THE SMUGGLERS OF LITTLE SLAVE LAKE.....or The Trapper's Vengeance
May 4—No. 23. NIGHT RIDERS OF THE NORTHWEST.....or The Vigilantes' Revenge
May 11—No. 24. THE SPECTRE OF THUNDERBOLT CAVERN..or Tricked by Midnight Assassins

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